

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

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The Bonnie Blue Flag

MARSE ROBERT was a great general, but the Cause lost in the end. Defeat corrodes the heart even unto the third and fourth generation, and there have come to be those trumpets blowing yellowly in copper light that trouble the reveries of Mr. Faulkner (who has served the Cause in a good many pages of nostalgic prose.) The night brings meditation and, dreaming, one may almost rearrange. It cannot be altogether as a tenet of agrarianism that the unreconstructed poets of Nashville have raised Nathan Bedford Forrest above Jeb Stuart, above Jackson even, till he sits at Lee's right hand: in that apotheosis must tremble the whisper of a great Perhaps . . . Perhaps . . . Almost . . . four hours in Hampton Roads . . . a shot in the spring dusk at Chancellorsville . . . spindrift blown back where the high tide broke on Cemetery Ridge. A passionate *if!* sleeps uneasily in the grandsons' blood and though they cannot win Marse Robert's war, they can draw their breath in pain to tell its story.

And, if one may be forgiven, how! There was the siege of Vicksburg in "So Red the Rose." There was Shiloh in "The Longest Night," the campaign for Atlanta in "Gone With the Wind," Chickamauga in "None Shall Look Back." In a few weeks there will be the siege of Richmond in "Bugles Blow No More." Beyond that is the unguessed future; heaven knows how many publishers have held a wet finger to windward, how many novelists, maps pinned to the study walls and "A Diary from Dixie" open on the desk, are swept up in the panic that follows Grierson's Raid. Many climaxes are still untouched—Vanderbilt's preference for the War in the West having kept fiction inattentive to the Peninsular campaigns, the Shenandoah Valley, the Confederate navy, even the two great invasions.

Surely trumpets may blow yellowly for Jeb Stuart riding round the Federal lines singing madrigals and wearing roses at his sabre-knot (he has so far been left to the Yankee Hergesheimer), for that tragic

moment when a patrol of Averell's found the copy of Lee's marching orders, for that line of winter huts along the Rappahannock. Surely the Army of Northern Virginia will win once more the perfect battles that have enraptured strategists for seventy years. Surely fiction will find use for the Right Reverend Lieutenant-General Leonidas Polk, for that Bayard of the second degree John Gordon, for that burlier Forrest, Uncle Dick Ewell, the woodcock, whose frontiersman's oaths and table manners corrupted by the Apache campaigns frighten the admiration of ladies, who has to be strapped in his saddle since he lost a leg at Groveton, who in moments of wellbeing cocks his head to one side and utters shrill bursts of song and chatter in the conviction that he is a bird.

They are not yet in fiction but they will be. The South lost the war but is in a fair way to win the renaissance. For fifty years following 1865 there was little war fiction worth the paper it was printed on, except as the nightmares of Ambrose Bierce and the fantasies of Stephen Crane required a local habitation. Then the production of spy and parted-lover novels subsided and it slowly became possible for fiction to raise up at long intervals such a fine and lonely monument as Mr. Boyd's "Marching On" or Miss Scott's "The Wave." But now suddenly, after seventy years, all Dixie is in flower. The sophomores among us can remember when Southern literature was just Miss Glasgow and Mr. Cabell; the elders recall when Illinois, succeeding Indiana, was fiction's truest home; the patriarchs go back to the time when Mr. Mencken ventured out in the footsteps of Frederick Law Olmstead and returned with "The Sahara of the Bozart." In fact Mr. Mencken may have begotten the renaissance. He marched three times round the walls blowing on a ram's horn, and now all our novelists are Southerners. And they all write about the War. "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again," says South Carolina's memorial window in Blandford Meeting House, quoting words which a damn Yankee wrote, and these days truth rises in thousands of pages, the Rebel yell exults across Parnassus, and the Yankee lines are still.

Or maybe they aren't. Reinforcements may even now be on the way to support Mr. Mackinlay Kantor, and in fact there is rumor of a formidable counter-attack already preparing, one of the high command of Northern fiction leading it in person. History may repeat itself in fiction even more literally than we are yet aware. In the War the South carried everything for the first two years, but once the North's enormous reserves in manpower got organized they soon prevailed. It may be that fiction today is only at Chancellorsville and that Gettysburg is to come, and then Grant in the Wilderness, and at last Sheridan's cavalry screen moving aside to reveal the encirclement at Appomattox.

Fiction's rediscovery of the principal occurrence in American history has produced much good reading and will doubtless produce much more. That is a clear gain, and the increased national awareness that it attests is gratifying. Nevertheless, as the books multiply and it has become necessary to introduce the wood-pulp industry in the South to keep up with them, increasingly there come moments when one does not care to read a Civil War novel. The public still supports the gigantic war effort, but let the publishers take note of those ominous moments. There may soon be draft riots in New York and mobs storming the warehouses in Richmond. In sheer surfeit we may demand an armistice, and some day a bright, new, thousand-page treatise on how plumes trailed in the dust after Bragg blundered may be greeted by a bored populace shouting: Let us have peace.

Don't Miss Old Faithful The principal geographical grudge this week, however, deals with the editor's own section, the West. He has been away from it long enough to forget some of its customs and so was momentarily surprised when all California rose protesting Mr. Idwal Jones's recent article in *The Saturday Review*. It was an excellent article, informed, discriminating, charmingly written, but it did not pretend to be either omniscient or infallible. The first protests came in by wire, the air mail amplified them the next day, and finally a thriftier patriotism, confided to the three-cent postage, fairly swamped the office. Mr. Jones and the editors of the *Review*, who shared the felony, were denounced with Western adjectives of fragrant memory and dared to come out and face tar and the rope like men. We had ignored the poetess laureate of Sonora County, we had not glanced at whole townships devoted to literary production near Los Angeles, immortal novelists and more immortal bards from Tia Juana to the Oregon line (bards by the long ton, F.O.B.) had been left unmentioned—and this from a deliberate spleen that was patently motivated by Eastern envy.

The West is that way. Chambers of Commerce pass resolutions blaming Wall Street when any literary article has left out the local lady who had a piece in *The Contributors' Club*, and it has been proved that the national census-takers, bribed by Broadway, subtract forty-five percent from the home town's total. Moreover, don't forget our new water-works, and have you seen the redwoods?

Advertisement: *The Saturday Review* asked Mr. Jones to write his impressions of California literature and is well pleased with what he wrote. Two other articles about literature in the West are in preparation. Mr. Thomas Hornsby Ferril and Miss Mari Sandoz who are writing them, however, will not deal with natural resources. For statistical information, please consult the proper local officials.

Letters to the Editor: *Reading for Pleasure; Some Notes on E. P. Roe*

Good Taste of the Public

SIR:—Having for the past few years been surprised at the good taste of the public as shown in the best seller lists, I was delighted to learn from the publicity given the Book-of-the-Month Club fellowships that there are not 5,000 people in the United States who will buy the books of James T. Farrell and Robinson Jeffers.

Lovers of poetry are naturally the people who will buy poetry. Why should those who are thrilled and inspired by the world's great poetry care to own a poem on the theme of incest? If Robinson Jeffers chose more pleasant subjects, he probably could sell as many books as Edna St. Vincent Millay, especially with the great help he has received from the critics during the years. But he doubtless prefers to write as he pleases.

Does any one read most of the proletarian novels except the critics and a very few proletarians? Most of the latter seem to prefer Zane Grey and E. Phillips Oppenheim. It is estimable for an author to want to change unfair conditions by his writing, but to make propaganda effective in poems and novels, he must first be able to write poems and novels. I prefer to read of social questions in non-fiction and do not care to read a novel that keeps me thinking how the author's back must have ached from typing so many long, dull pages.

The fact that so many critics praise dull and incoherent books makes one particularly appreciative of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, its editors and contributors, who do not hesitate to give minority reports on Nobel awards and to tell the truth about inaccurate and amateurish history. It is wonderful to have books reviewed by those who know much about their subjects and the result is that you seldom have a poor review or one that appears to be prejudiced. In fact I can think of only one at present—Louis Adamic's review of "This Labor Union Racket" by Edward Dean Sullivan, given in connection with one on "The History of the Haymarket Affair." I cannot see how any one who thinks that working men have the right to organize and that they should get the full benefit of their union memberships could object to Mr. Sullivan's book. Of course a book exposing evils is not necessarily expected to be a work of art, but Mr. Adamic wrote of it so contemptuously that he made me want to read it.

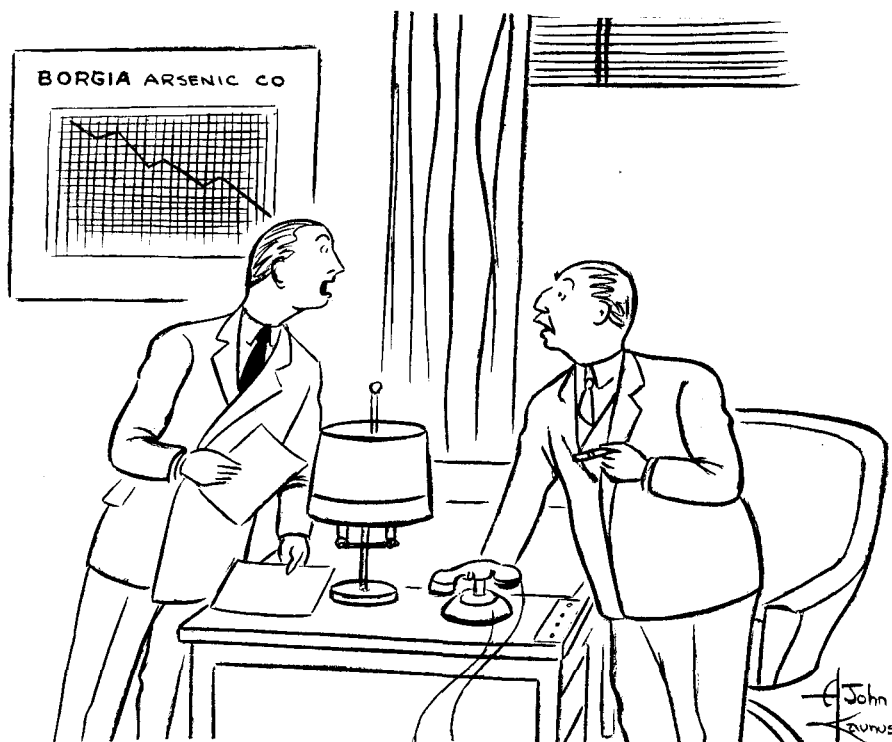
S. H.

San Jose, Cal.

The Douglas of His Day

SIR:—Here's someone in the house who has read some of E. P. Roe's novels, though it would be more than 20 years ago come any day you'd name.

I'd say Roe was the Lloyd Douglas of his time, because he, too, began his career as a minister. He lived at Cornwall-on-the-Hudson. Our copy of "Day of Fate," published by Dodd, Mead in 1880, gives the author as "Rev. E. P. Roe," but the



"CONSUMERS' RESEARCH SAYS THERE ISN'T ANY ARSENIC IN OUR ARSENIC!"

copy of "Driven Back to Eden" (our edition, that of 1888, though the copyright date is 1885) omits the "Rev."

The Hudson valley was enormously proud of its author up there at Cornwall, and all the folks bought his books. I caught up with them in the little Michigan town where my father's mother lived during my 'teens. I used to lie in the hammock on summer vacation visits and read right through all the Roe there was.

"Driven Back to Eden" impressed me most. It's about a New York family hit by a personal depression. Papa buys a farm, and they carry on like the Swiss Family Robinson in Jersey or wherever it was, certainly not in Westchester County or Connecticut. Incidentally, the children are saved from the dreadful influences of being brought up on the sidewalks of New York.

HELEN C. BOWER.

Detroit, Mich.

Small Books

SIR:—About small books. Maybe it's only the proved ones, the known, that can afford to be small. New and unknown, your books must get attention by sheer bulk. The accolade of the small format can be bestowed only when the name on the back strip has sufficient weight to balance the book's lack of it.

But here's an odd thing: only essays dare be small from the start. I like to think it must be because they alone are independent and even arrogant. They neither expect nor want the hordes of readers that will push them into a reprint duodecimo. Later, perhaps, as the word gets about, but there's no hurry. Mean-

while, they dare be themselves—and you can take them or leave them alone. Me, I take them.

MARJORIE TYLER.

Geneva, Illinois.

Fray

SIR:—Following Katherine Wilson's letter in the February 6th S. R. L. you say the controversy over keeping politics out of book reviews is still unsettled. This is bad news. The S. R. L., since Miss or Mrs. Wilson's first letter, has seemed to have considerably less of the New Dealish Columbia University flavor. One of Miss or Mrs. Wilson's humble admirers and long a subscriber to the S. R. L. begs her to return to the fray.

C. G. L.

Kenilworth, Ill.

Slang

SIR:—The editor of the Historical Dictionary of American Slang, A. Dilworth Faber, has again started work on the dictionary, which he is doing at the suggestion of Sir William Craigie, one of the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary. This slang dictionary will be comprehensive and completely cover the American field. Anyone having any material or who is interested in slang please get in touch with Mr. Faber at No. 439, 207 East 84th Street, New York City. He would appreciate it if those who have been in touch with him before get in touch with him again as much of the already gathered material was lost in a fire.

A. DILWORTH FABER.

New York City.