

A Psychological Jekyll and Hyde

THE MAN WHO STARTED CLEAN. By T. O. Beachcroft. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

MR. BEACHCROFT, an Englishman, has written unusual short stories, but this, so far as the present reviewer knows, is his first novel. The central situation of the story, he tells us, is taken from a medical case history. Other novels have been written featuring amnesia, or loss of memory, but in this instance the protagonist so completely loses his memory (owing to a violent accident) that he returns to the state of a new-born child. In the process of recovering it he develops a dual personality that is especially baffling to the girl he loves and finds again while in his "second state."

Before his loss of memory he is quite an ordinary young man on the way up in his uncle's business and controlled by his uncle's entirely conventional ideas and ambition for him. After his memory has disappeared, he develops rapidly from an infantile state into an independent inquirer and questioner of conventional life and conservative ideas. He becomes an intense individualist with no slightest desire to fit into the workaday world. In this new personality, he appals his stick-in-the-mud uncle; and several passages between them, and his uncle's attempts to deal with the situation, have fine dry humor. Edmund's later account to Dr. Kynaston of his sensations upon and after recovering consciousness with his memory gone, is fascinating and convincing. In fact, the document becomes remarkably and truly poetic. Life assumes a vivid and terrifying intensity to the newly cleansed vision, an intensity that hints of Blake and Whitman:

Coarse and drunken men glow with the brightness of angels; a little child with bright hair takes joy in the torture of living things; a beautiful girl of fifteen has the wet blood of a fox's carcass, hot and smoking from the hounds' jaws, smeared upon her face; a man is torn from his bride's bed and shot against a whitewashed wall, with her kisses still upon his lips; a murderer flings himself into a horrible death to save the lives of strangers. The smallest wing on the air is too huge for understanding, and the whole network of the stars at midnight will contract into the palm of my hand.

All this is excellent and absorbing, and the type of dual personality evolved (the two finally to be blended into a composite Edmund with a much greater grasp on reality than formerly), makes the old Jekyll and Hyde story (despite its dramatic values) seem rather like claptrap. But somehow one lays the book down with the feeling that Mr. Beachcroft has muffed a big chance. A master would

have made this book masterly, and it falls short. One feels that only in the case of the second Edmund does the characterization go deep enough. Nevertheless, it is an original and often moving story, though, again, in the treatment, at intervals, one almost sees a Wodehouse narrative hovering in the wings. A fault of method, somewhere. Decidedly, however, a novel worth reading.

London Wasteland

THERE AIN'T NO JUSTICE. By James Curtis. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1937. \$2.50.

THE London slum-dwellers, the pugs, tarts, bar-flies, who root about in James Curtis's novel, might sometimes mutter "There ain't no justice," but they would not thereby be passing judgment upon their environment, or plotting rebellion, things that phrase usually implies. Upon their lips it would be just such a complaint as we might offer up against the rain or the cold, or against death itself, a helpless commentary given voice only for the momentary relief such expression brings. But there is no hope in it for larger relief, nor belief that such relief can be. That is the biggest force in the book, a bleak fatalism deeply imprinted upon the mind and life of all the characters. They are not tragic because they do not struggle or dream; they feel they are clay at the core. It is a completely black and rigid picture, psychically a genre study, of its kind perfectly done.

It has seemed necessary to establish the atmosphere first, since the story itself is inconsequential and depends upon this atmosphere of fatalism for the significance it undoubtedly possesses. Tommy Mutch is a preliminary boy who is jockeyed into a series of boxing victories by a crooked promoter. Even when he believes he is actually a good fighter (for they don't tell him the fights are fixed) he knows no joy in his fighting. It is his trade, a giving and taking of beatings for the money in it, for the drinks he can buy and the girls he can get. A good half of Mr. Curtis's pages are devoted to reports of these fights, and they are, quite apart from the book itself, as unromanticized and unrelenting a study of cold brutality as fistic fiction has to offer.

Tommy's brief delusions of success, his discovery of the fraud, and his violent attack upon his deceivers, are all of the drama that remains. The story moves in sudden spasms of action that serve to light up, intermittently, the really hopeless gloom that gives character to the scene. It is a modern London wasteland, inhabited by excellently described and developed figures. Mr. Curtis's achievement is in bringing these to us really and wholly, unadorned by any of the dignities and compensations of literature. The book is a powerful job of realistic writing.

The Trojan Horse

(Continued from page 12)

hopes to worm some of our secrets out of a confiding daughter? And consider the case of the girl herself, thrown into the license and disorder of a military encampment. Do not think I am moved only by being her near kinsman. Here she has a home, friends, protection, and at this moment a chance to resume social usefulness after some years of domestic shock. Is it our Trojan chivalry to use one of our own children as a political pawn?

PARIS—Hear, hear! Very well said, my lord.

PANDARUS—I don't suppose anyone here recalls the case of Chryseis and Bryseis—

ILIUM—Sure, I do. A couple of tarts.

PANDARUS—I can hardly say that the gentleman takes the words from my mouth, for I had intended a softer phrase. But such is the fact. Chryseis and Bryseis were a pair of our own Trojan country girls who were too confidingly entrusted to the Greek headquarters. Gentlemen, their demoralization was complete. I've been told that they are now professional habituées of Sarpedoni's dance hall,—practically on the menu.

HECTOR—Surely, sir, you show unnecessary doubts of the lady's stability? In any case, she will have her own father as chaperon. What more can we ask?

PANDARUS—And finally, consider the publicity aspect. If it becomes known that we barter our females for campaign advantage, it would make the name of Troy shameful for ages to come.

ILIUM—I can't imagine ages to come worrying about this old burg. They'll have troubles of their own.

PRIAM—Admitted that international traffic in women has its drawbacks.

BRASS HATS—Question! Question!

HECTOR—I move you, sir, that we accept the enemy's proposal.

BRASS HATS—Second the motion.

PRIAM—You have heard. All in favor of the motion?

(Hector and the three brass hats rise.)

It is carried, four to three. It is painful to go against the judgment of one of our most respected members, but I must believe that his forebodings are excessive. PANDARUS—At least you will give the girl time to prepare herself for this deplorable event.

PRIAM—Hector, if you will bring in the Greek envoy we can discuss the necessary arrangements.

ILIUM—1185 B. C. marches on!

XVII. Half Way Across the Dark

Pandarus's house; the patio in evening light. Coffee and liqueurs have been served. The ladies invited to say goodbye to Cressida are now leaving at last, with the usual female reluctance and multiplied valediction. Pandarus is easing them toward the doorway, where Dares skillfully completes the process of ex-

trusion. Troilus (in modern uniform) stands on the outskirts of the group; he looks unhappy.

HECUBA—Well, my dear, I really must go.

TROILUS—Now mother, you're repeating yourself.

HECUBA—I hope you'll find your father improved. Take your knitting with you, it's a great consolation if you have to sit up late with an invalid. Troilus, are you coming with me?

PANDARUS—I'm sorry, ma'am, I'm keeping him a while; we have some business.

HECUBA—I really hate to go, this is the only house in Troy where one still gets decent coffee.

PANDARUS—you're very kind, ma'am. (But he takes away her cup so she can't ask for more).—I'm afraid it's too strong, it keeps people awake.

HECUBA—That's just what I need.

PANDARUS—The ruling classes should spend at least half their lives in sleep. (He moves her firmly toward the door).

HELEN—When you see Menelaus, be sure to give him my messages. Tell him not to do too much. If they win he'll have to take me back; that'll give him a scare.

ANDROMACHE—I think it's wonderful of you to do this for us; it's real patriotism. I'm going to write an editorial about it for the Junior League.

HECUBA—The Greeks are very attractive socially; don't let them persuade you to stay too long.

CREUSA—I'm sure you're tired, so we won't keep you.

PANDARUS—I know my niece appreciates so many kind wishes. I mustn't let her stay, she still has some packing to do.

HELEN—Goodbye dear, I envy you having a chance to get out of town.

ANDROMACHE—Try to find out what they're wearing in Sparta this season.

CRESSIDA—It was so sweet of you all, I don't know what to say. I'll be back before you know I'm gone.

And now they have got them all through the door. Aren't women terrible, says Cressida. The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea, observes Pandarus, waving farewells. He turns and sees that Cressida is already in Troilus's arms.—I guess this is one of those evenings when I take Antigone to the movies, he says; and leaves.

(To be continued).

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Recent Contacts in Hollywood

For the last two years I have been in Hollywood, the major part of this time as Story Editor for the Zeppo Marx agency, one of the most important agencies on the coast. It was while I was marketing the works and services of some of the leading writers in the film industry that I became increasingly aware of the fact that very many stories and novels which might well have been sold to the movies for good prices, remained unsold because they were not presented in the form best suited to ensure their sale. I therefore decided to devote my entire time, as well as the experience and contacts which I have acquired, to helping the new writer who has been struggling along without guidance, as well as the more established one who also requires the help I can give. I offer two separate services.

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WHILE these services, as described above, may sound reminiscent of other services now offered, I believe they differ in two very fundamental respects: first, that I have no intention of offering more than I can deliver—I would rather do a good job for a few authors than have a factory for "mass production" literary criticism; and second, the fourteen years of practical business (as well as literary) experience with which I can approach an author's problems. I suggest that you send your Mss. to me on either of the above bases or if you have any questions to ask—write to me and I will answer them promptly.

DONALD FRIEDE

9172 SUNSET BOULEVARD
HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

The Status of Science

THE ADVANCING FRONT OF SCIENCE. By George W. Gray. New York: Whittlesey House. 1937. \$3.

ASPECTS OF SCIENCE. By Tobias Dantzig. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN RIORDAN

THESE books, each with its own virtues, contrast and complement each other. Mr. Gray's book, a recent selection of the Scientific Book Club, is a careful, spirited, popular (in the best sense) résumé of a number of relatively recent scientific achievements; his range runs the full gamut from atoms and stars to life. Since he has had the advantage of personal contact with some of the leaders in this advance, his summaries are informed and intelligent. Dr. Dantzig has no concern with particular scientific results; he is interested in the rationale of science. Thus, whereas one book explains in detail the currently achieved picture of the nature of atoms, stars, and of life, the other undertakes a critique of the pictures obtained by scientific method. Each of these things has of course been done before, though not, again of course, in the same way or from the same viewpoint, but both stand doing a number of times; the one because the achievements of science are news, and need the careful consideration gained by book publication; the other because the assimilation of the current revolution in science is possibly central in the understanding of our culture.

The contents of Mr. Gray's book must be suggested by sampling. The first few chapters dealing with the earth's atmosphere and the stars are distinctive in containing an account of Karl K. Jansky's recent discovery of a kind of cosmic static, and an extremely able summary of the work of Hubble and Tolman

on the expanding universe. The most interesting discovery within the atom seems to be that of an attractive force between protons, of unknown character, which overrides the repulsive force due to their like charge, and is thus responsible for the existence of the great variety of atoms we know, rather than the sole existence of primitive hydrogen. Chemistry is represented not only by a general survey of the great number of new materials produced by its aid, but by a biographical sketch of Irving Langmuir and a summary of his work. For the life sciences, one of the highlights is the account of Wendell M. Stanley's crystallization of the tobacco mosaic virus.

Mr. Gray has signally omitted the Queen of the Sciences, mathematics, but Dr. Dantzig supplies the lack. Indeed his book might have been titled: The Bearing of Mathematics on the Sciences. Beginning with a rather heavy recital of the depressing predetermined picture of the universe held by classical science, he quickly strikes the vivid stride of the modern revolution. The presuppositions of the former are traced to their root in the mathematical infinite (and its counterpart, the infinitesimal); the evolution of the sciences is taken to be their mathematization. But the infinite involves many difficulties and antinomies; in fact, it is the chief headache in scientific thought. A precise examination of its relation to physical science, beautifully conducted by Dr. Dantzig, leads to such paradoxes as a practical physicist being an idealist and, more importantly, completely disposes of the classical view. The final result is that "it is impossible, by means of observations alone, to separate the *observata* from the *observer*," that is to say, the objective world of classical science has only a kind of provisional and conventional existence. The discussion of this conclusion, which seems to be

the big news of the day, has been heated and confused; Dr. Dantzig shows how poorly founded is the idea that it is bringing science and religion to a closer union. There seems no doubt that it sums up an era; with time and luck it may mean the birth of a new era. For the meantime Dr. Dantzig has given the aphorism: "Read your instruments and obey mathematics; for this is the whole duty of the scientist."

It seems too much to expect a wide public for Dr. Dantzig's elegant performance, but those with the wits for his feast will enjoy great fare.

The Scenic Stage

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEATER: A study of the theatrical art from the beginnings to the present day. By Allardyce Nicoll. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1937. \$10.

Reviewed by RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THIS is a revision, and to some extent an expansion, of Professor Nicoll's scholarly history of "the playhouses and their mise-en-scene"; its author describes it, modestly, as an "outline" and intends it for scholars. It is admirably illustrated; the casual student of this essentially casual art may treat the volume almost as a picture book; even the general reader may find it pretty. The general reader, with his odd, unscholarly notion that the theater is a bare hulk when there is no play in it may, however, be a little chilled at Mr. Nicoll's essentially architectural point of view, and tear himself away without too much reluctance from "The Development of the Theater" to spend a couple of riotous hours at "Room Service."

I have, I am afraid, a not too sneaking sympathy with the average reader in this. Mr. Nicoll believes differently, of course. "The study of the theater of the past is one which is necessary not only for the scenic artist, but for the true playgoer," he reflects. "Unless we have a knowledge of past theatrical history we can barely form an opinion concerning the more recent developments in scenic history." I do not think this is quite true; an active playgoer can form an opinion of anything, as Mr. Nicoll, if he practised instead of taught drama criticism, would bruisedly know.

Only a specialist, of course, can properly review a specialist's book. Mr. Nicoll's carries, however, the conviction of its own scholarship. I am sure that so long as he confines himself to history only another scholar could quarrel with him.

Of course, like most specialists, he does not so confine himself. His recently revised final chapter concerns the modern stage, and it is at once too condensed and too arbitrary. Realism in design is out; conventionalized design is in. Only, I gather, from this conventionalism will we wrest things "more worthy and more enduring than the problem dramas of a Pinero and a Jones." The connection, I confess, escapes me. But, then, I never understand the "scenery boys" and I think Mr. Nicoll is one of them. They'll probably get us in the end, too.

Catharine Macadam's

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