

should be about something. Well, there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the stars; the Russian novel, as a rule, is not about something—though “War and Peace” would have been a better novel if it had not tried to be—but most of the good American novels have had something in them besides character and manners; and the greatness of Coolidgean literature lay precisely in the fact that it was about something, a great cosmic (or would-be cosmic) “To hell with all that!” Its best product was “Babbitt,” and “Babbitt” would not be much if America had not had a face which Lewis disliked intensely, and which his readers could recognize even if they thought he distorted it as much as El Greco.

But what is recognizable now? The Union League Club has a face and so has C.I.O. headquarters, but they and everything in between do not add up into anything definable, and without definition, agreement, without a literal commonplace to start from, it is pretty hard to get anywhere. An artist of the first rank might impose his vision; we could use him, but he has not yet turned up. Meanwhile artists of the second rank look no bigger than they are. This is an age of revolution—mild as yet, moderate in its manners as well as in its accomplishments, but revolution none the less in basic American concepts and perhaps ultimately in social and economic structure. Revolutions commonly keep people at once too preoccupied and too unsettled to produce any very high grade of literature. If we had a Lucretius or a Catullus among us, he might write as well as Lucretius and Catullus did in troubled times; though Lucretius's work may well have been escape literature, and when Catullus touched the issues of his day, what he wrote differed only in quality from what you can read in the *Evening Sun*. The sort of writers we actually have may expect to see Radio cross 500 again before they will look as big as they did in the Golden Age.

*Elmer Davis's articles on contemporary social attitudes have been valuable features of contemporary magazine-literature.*

## Geographical Studies

**ENVIRONMENT AND NATION.** By Griffith Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1936. \$4.

PROFESSOR TAYLOR here attempts to analyze the geographical relationships of the history of Europe. His book will be a great help in building up a new understanding of the history that has made us what we are. It is not easy to read because it is packed with details, and the diagrams and maps require much study. On the other hand, it is a book to which many people will turn for information as to specific periods of history. It contains the materials from which many lighter books can easily be constructed, and they will be works of high value.

## A Bitter Conclusion

**ZEPPELIN.** By Captain Ernst A. Lehmann. In collaboration with Leonard Adelt. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

WHEN the *Hindenburg* crashed in flames last May, Captain Ernst Lehmann crawled from the wreckage, fatally burned repeating: “I don’t understand it, I don’t understand it!” It was a bitter conclusion to his years of effort toward convincing the timorous that lighter-than-air craft were the most practical vessels of peace. On his world circuit with the *Graf Zeppelin* and his many trips with the same dirigible to North and South America he had done as much as any man to recapture the world’s respect for Germany. It was forgotten that he had participated in, and often directed, the raids on London dur-



CAPTAIN LEHMANN

ing the war; he had done his duty, cruelly and well, as he recounts in this posthumous book; he had destroyed wherever he could, but his ideal, like Count Zeppelin’s, was unalterably that of making the airship a courier between peaceful lands.

Captain Lehmann tells in detail the history of the Zeppelin type airship, its many disasters, its indifferent acknowledgment by his government even during the war—a record of faith among a very small group, Zeppelin, Eckener, Lehmann, Durr, Gemmingen, and a few others, who frequently had to finance their dream from their own pockets. As a war machine the Zeppelin was effective only (because of its inflammable hydrogen content) until the incendiary bullets of the Allies were discovered. It was then at once at the mercy of a pistol shot from any plane which could climb to its height.

The story of the London air raids, told from the German perspective, is the most interesting of the book, perhaps because Captain Lehmann was able to describe them at first hand. It is his belief that a great deal of the destruction in London which has been attributed to German aircraft was actually caused by the misdirected shells of the British falling back upon their own city. Elsewhere he quotes at length from the reports of his fellow airmen, one after another, until all those lethal excursions seem, as to their participants, rather dull and alike. But there are enlightening anecdotes: of the Saxon King who distrusted Dr. Hugo Eckener’s engineering because he was a mere Ph.D., of the aviator, Ackerman, who was shot down with his LZ37 and was saved by falling into a nun’s bed.

## English '37

(Continued from page 8)

den put on it intolerable. It grows tired of too great mass and too strong tension, and it reverts explosively to the looseness, and lucidity, and freedom from pressure of Charles Dickens’s day. “David Copperfield” is no book for fools—it will return to anyone quite as much as he is able to bring to it. But there is in it enough space to turn round in, and time enough to take things as they come and as you will; it has what modern fiction seldom has, leisure, and it has what the modern audience sometimes desires to the complete reversal of its ordinary taste, improvisation and spontaneity and a magnificence irrelevance.

In short, the law of diminishing returns and the principle of mathematical limits apply to the modern novel. The intricate and exhausting technique of “Ulysses” is employed primarily to make us know Leopold Bloom. At the end we do know him, superbly, but no better than we know, say, Becky Sharp and Huck Finn, and the accessory purposes of the novel are no better served than Thackeray and Mark Twain contrived to serve theirs. There is a limit fixed to fiction—and it has been reached by many avenues of approach.

And the novelties of experience and satisfaction which modern fiction has given the reader, the new areas it has occupied, have been paid for, sometimes, out of principal. Sometimes, in devising instruments with which to explore the recesses of personality ignored by earlier novelists, the novel of our day has come out with phantoms which might have been characters if less delicate mechanisms had been put to work on them. Sometimes in striving for mass it has achieved dead weight instead. And often it has refined its substance so much that it has refined it away—in the pursuit of the mind or the truth or the great society it has forgotten, and has had to be reminded by failure, that fiction is the art of telling stories about people.

# Who Will Bid Most?

BY JOHN T. WINTERICH

SHAKESPEARE still lived when the great printing and publishing house of the Elzevirs in Leyden added bookselling by auction to the roster of its enterprises. Milton had been two years dead when William Cooper, himself an Elzevir in a small way, transplanted the idea across the Channel in announcing the impending dispersal of the library of Dr. Lazarus Seaman and issued therefor a catalogue which has itself become a collecting desideratum.

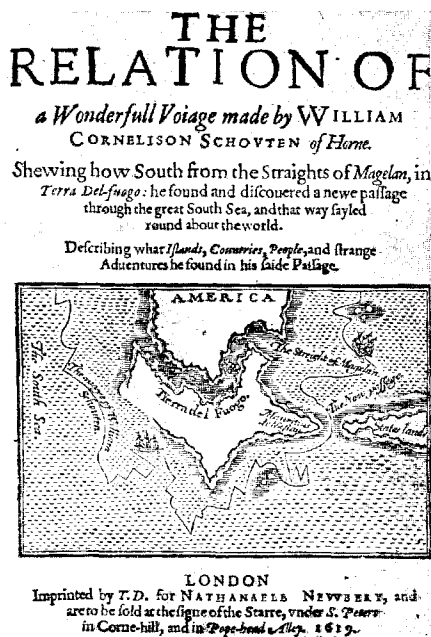
It hath not been usual here in England [wrote Cooper in his preface] to make Sale of books by way of Auction, or Who will give most for them; but it having been practised in other Countreys to the Advantage of both Buyers and Sellers, it was therefore conceived (for the encouragement of learning) to publish the Sale of these Books this manner of way; and it is hoped that this will not be unacceptable to Schollers.

There is mild excuse for irony in the reflection that whereas the first book auction in English was designed for the learned, only as a last resort does an auction cataloguer of today designate an assemblage of books hailed into the market place as "a scholar's library." Then he sits back fearing (and usually getting) the worst. But the irony is only skin deep. Scholar and collector were once one flesh. They have become twain—some of them, anyway—and the steps in the division of the nucleus lead, directly and inevitably, to the monumental and essential compendium here under tangential consideration,\* which, listing the titles sold and the prices they fetched, in America only, during the most topsy-turvy decade in auction history, itemizes a turnover in literary property that must approach \$15,000,000.

What has been happening to the values of rare books and manuscripts in this period? The lean years of 1930-1933 constituted the only economic crisis in history that has ever affected book prices. So drastic was the involvement that the book market has not yet recovered from it. The deflation may have been a deserved rebuke, for the 1920's had witnessed a fantastic ballooning of book values, culminating in the gilded incredibility of the Kern sale. It can be soundly argued, of course, that books held up as well as, or better than, securities.

But this is not the whole story. The old-school collector is on the way to becoming extinct. Whether the process will be halted is wholly unpredictable—the new school may turn old school. Certainly the

old-school bookseller is frankly and perhaps unjustifiably pessimistic. He sighs for the days of the Chews and the Hagens and the Hoes and the Wallaces, of Herschel V. Jones and William Loring Andrews, of Marshall C. Lefferts and Henry W. Poor and M. C. D. Borden—for the day of days of Henry E. Huntington. That spacious era—spacious in the amplitude of its strong boxes, in its stratospheric removal from the tax collector, in its leisure for browsing and reading and study, in the



## FROM A VERY RARE FIRST OF THE HUNTINGTON COLLECTION

sheer physical bulk of its country seats (the drang nach Park Avenue has raised hob with book-shelving and therefore with book selling)—can never be born anew from its own ashes. Can a different set of conditions produce anything at all approximating it?

When all is said and done, if it ever is, there is only one factor that makes the price of a book go up or down: the degree to which somebody wants it and is able to pay for it abetted by the degree to which somebody else wants it not quite so much. Only such considerations can account for the fact that the Wallace copy of "Robinson Crusoe" (London, 1719, with the "Farther Adventures" and "Serious Reflections") sold for \$2,050 in March, 1920, for \$3,525 (Bernheim) in January, 1926, and for \$1,600 (Seth Terry) in December, 1935, or for the added fact that a copy of Robert Dodsley's "The Preceptor" (London, 1775) containing inscriptions by four generations of the Adams family, from President John down, should sell for \$160 in January, 1925 (Goldsmith), for \$100 in March, 1927 (Bailey), for \$65 in

April, 1934 (Gaige), and for \$50 in April, 1936 (Sabin). It speaks volumes—two in this instance—for the confusion of these times that this one lot has changed hands four times in eleven years.

Occasionally an auction lot exemplifies a consistent price level that no other commodity could ever hope to match. The corrected proof sheets of Browning's "The Ring and the Book" (London, 1868-9) sold for \$680 in the Arnold sale of May, 1901. Thirty-five years later (Smith, April, 1936) they resold for \$675. The Hagen copy of Sir Thomas Browne's "Hydriotaphia" (London, 1658) was worth \$100 in May, 1918, and the same amount in November, 1920, as the Clawson copy. Coolidge prosperity elevated it beyond its station in the Adam sale of February, 1926, when it fetched \$130. As the Terry copy it had regained, in December, 1935, its proper economic status—\$100. I leave the explanation of the following to one better equipped in numerology: Michael Drayton's "The Battaile of Agincourt" (London, 1627): Huth (June, 1912), £9; Chew (December, 1924), \$190; Terry (December, 1935), \$90. The Goelt copy of the same book (January, 1935) brought \$140, and two years later (Harding, March, 1937) \$120.

Stress is laid on the Seth Terry sale in these notes only because it contained a remarkably high percentage of items of lengthy and distinguished collector lineage. The trend was by no means all in one direction. The copy of Dickens's "American Notes" (London, 1842) which he presented to Jonathan Chapman, mayor of Boston and his first cisatlantic host, brought \$1,050 at the Terry sale as against \$950 at the Adam sale in March, 1926; Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" (London, 1820), first edition, second issue, original boards, \$650 as against \$320 as the Adam copy; Sir Thomas Browne's "Religio Medici" (London, 1642), the earliest (unauthorized) issue, \$670 as against \$380 as the Adam copy. To embrace longer time intervals, the Wallace copy of Herrick's "Hesperides" and "Noble Numbers" (London, 1648-47, two volumes in one) sold in March, 1920, for \$510, and for \$2,100 as the Terry copy; the Daly copy of Milton's "Poems" (London, 1640) sold in March, 1900, for \$490, and for \$3,100 in the Terry sale. At a more moderate, but still impressive, ratio of increase, the Huntington copy of Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" (London, 1765) brought \$47.50 in December, 1917; as the Jones copy (March, 1919) \$40, and as the Terry copy, \$80. The Borden copy of the Kilmarnock Burns (1786) sold for \$2,000 in February, 1913; for \$2,200 in March, 1920, as the Wallace copy; for \$3,200 as the Terry copy. And hurrahs echoed when the Christie-Miller "Paradise Lost" (London, 1667, first title-page), a superlative example which had been quite literally lost until its discovery at Lamport Hall in 1867, and which had sold in 1919 for £460 and in appearance in 1935 (Terry) for \$17,500.

\* AMERICAN BOOK-PRICES CURRENT. A PRICED INDEX. 1923-1932. Compiled by Eugenia and Lucie E. Wallace. 500 copies. New York: R. R. Bowker Co. 1936. \$45. Prices listed in this paper are also cited from subsequent annual volumes in the series and (in the instance of more recent valuations) from auction catalogues.