

Some New Theories about Shakespeare

SHAKESPEARE REDISCOVERED. By Clara Longworth de Chambrun. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by TUCKER BROOKE

FRANCIS THOMPSON once alluded to the Elizabethan age as a time "when a man got up in the morning and said, 'I have an idea. If you have nothing better to do, let us go continent-hunting.'" In such a spirit Mme. de Chambrun has set out to rediscover Shakespeare. The result is both magnificent and absurd. With magnificent courage, energy, and resourcefulness she has followed out new clues and ventured rash inferences which will have to be thoughtfully considered. To the professorial mind (which she candidly abhors) it seems little less than absurd that the countess has not bothered more about accuracy of date, quotation, and argumentative logic.

The professors will, as I say, have to take her new findings, puzzle them out, and be thankful; but before they can do this they will have a heavy task of rectification to carry through. They will wonder, for example, why it is stated on page 40 that Shakespeare was baptized in April, 1563, or on page 27 that the "natural retaliation of the See of Rome" for Norfolk's execution in 1572 was the papal Bill of Excommunication in 1570; or why, when Southampton's birth is correctly dated on page 114 (October, 1573), the next page should fix his coming of age in October, 1593. They will find quoted passages so habitually inexact that they will begin by assuming that the countess misuses her admirable memory and end by inferring that she employs quotation marks not to give the author's words but to italicize her notion of what the author meant. They will be frequently appalled by the assumptions she allows herself; as, for instance, that the performance of "Richard II" in 1601 "caused the death of six men," because six men who attended it were executed for their complicity in the Essex plot; or

that "the supposed connection of actors with the idea of papistry and plots caused all playhouses to be relegated to the Surrey side of the Thames"—which is to imply that the London municipal authorities (who opposed plays) had the national safety in mind and the Privy Council (who favored them) did not.

I have not overstated the case for the professors, but the churliest of them must admit that Mme. de Chambrun has written a brave and potentially illuminating book. Her most striking new ideas are that Shakespeare was all his life a Papist, supported by Papists and persecuted by Protestants; that his concern in the Essex rising forced him to flee to Scotland in 1601; and that the copy of Holinshed's Chronicles which she recently discovered in Stratford is Shakespeare's own copy with marginalia in the poet's hand. These are arresting thoughts and worth study, but not, I think, at present worthy of credence. One of the minor factual contributions in the book is a satisfying proof that the poet's will is in Francis Collins's handwriting—which has been often stated, but never so well demonstrated; and one of its laudable merits is the author's frank and scholarly retraction of an earlier opinion in this regard.

Tucker Brooke is professor of English at Yale University.

Reminiscences of an Irish Story Teller

THE ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN. By Seumas MacManus. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

NEARLY forty years ago, Mr. Seumas MacManus came to this country on a political errand and, with intervals in his native Donegal, he has remained here, more or less, ever since. Despite that fact, and despite his having been all his life a militant nationalist, this autobiographical volume has more analogies with "Twenty Years A-growing" and "Man of Aran" than with "Hail and Farewell," "As I Was Walking Down Sackville Street," or "The Trembling of the Veil." The latter three are as truly Irish as the former two, but a stranger might well be puzzled as to how all five could be the work of writers born in the same small country and writing of life there. Of course, Irish life on the Great Blasket, on the Aran Islands, and in Dublin, presents the usual differences between urban and rural civilization, but in Ireland these differences are more sharply marked. Mr. MacManus, save for his final chapter, in which his first arrival here is briefly described, has con-

Tommy Lee Feathers and his Black Angels make a second touchdown for ED BELL author of *Fish on the Steeple*

AMID the joyous cheers of critics and readers, Ed Bell charged onto the literary field with his lusty, flavorful, novel of small southern hill towns—*Fish on the Steeple*. Here he comes with another book that is sure to repeat his earlier triumph and add to his fame.

Tommy Lee Feathers is more than the story of the fightingest fullback in the whole South, the "Red Grange" of the colored race. It is also the story of his revivalist

mother and her flock, of Sister Never-Die and her "fatherless" children, of rich and ratlike Witherspoon Rawls, of Doctor Fleetwood who wore pink shirts and played practical jokes, and of Lury, the northern girl who broke Tommy Lee's heart. It is the story of Life on the *wrong* side of the railroad tracks in Tennessee, of the warmth, passion and high good humor of a people who have made a colorful life of their own in the white man's world.



Tommy Lee Feathers

BY ED BELL

author of *FISH ON THE STEEPLE*

308 pages, \$2.50 FARRAR & RINEHART

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 212)

DON MARQUIS—"THIS IS
ANOTHER DAY"

This is another day; and its young
strength
Is laid upon the quivering hills
until,
Like Egypt's Memnon, they grow
quick with song. . . .
And out of all the dust and death
of mine
Old selves I dare to lift a singing
heart
And living faith.

fined his book to the first thirty years of his life in Donegal.

With an affection and nostalgia bordering on the saccharine, Mr. MacManus recalls his childhood in a small community in the Donegal hills. We hear of the barefooted children tramping the roads to school, bringing their contribution of turf for the schoolroom fire and of pence for the underpaid schoolmaster, of the scarcity of books and the widespread gift for music and story-telling, the latter so common that when Mr. MacManus returned with American gold in his pocket for the sale of those same stories, his friends could not believe that the retelling of them had earned money, so they preferred not to inquire as to how he had come by his wealth in America. Their publication here, incidentally, involved the author in a charge of plagiarism, which was settled only by the discovery that these folk tales were the common lore of people as far from Donegal as the Turks, the Arabians, and the Persians.

Mr. MacManus became a public school teacher, in his turn, and his only political references are to the interference by the British government inspectors with his efforts to give a national education to the children in a National School—as the public schools in Ireland were ironically called, since everything relating to Irish nationality was taboo until the establishment of the Irish Free State. While schoolmastering and looking forward to his government pension in old age, Mr. MacManus began to write poems and stories, until finally he emerged as a real “book author.” His first steps in the paths of Irish provincial journalism are described with humor, a humor perhaps enhanced by the exceptional luck which seems to have attended Mr. MacManus’s efforts to break into print, from three years of weekly contributions to the *Donegal Vindicator*—for which he finally was paid, as a favor, \$2.50—to his cordial reception by Mr. Alden of *Harper’s*, when he arrived as a greenhorn in New York. He sold six out of seven stories, and for the first time in his life received the sum of one hundred dollars for one of them.

In the main, however, Mr. MacManus is not so much concerned with himself as a writer as with Donegal and his own people. His descriptions are of local scenes and local characters, wakes and marriages, superstitions and customs which are gradually dying out. He writes here in the manner to which his readers are accustomed, a manner which, in its earliest manifestations, was accused of Stage Irishism, and which still has too thick a brogue and too much blarney to be acceptable to any but the uncritical. At any moment, one expects to hear a jig or a reel, and hear someone shout: “Will ye tread on the tail of me coat?” However, that is the note which Mr. MacManus has struck from the beginning, and those who liked it in his stories will like it in this chapter of autobiography.

Sensitive Boyhood

THE PAST MUST ALTER. By Albert J. Guerard. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

AT the age of twenty a new novelist who is worth our attention emerges from the West. His first book, here under review, has already appeared in England. A previous version of its concluding chapters won *Hound and Horn’s* intercollegiate competition, and Edward J. O’Brien three-starred it in one of his anthologies.

The book covers three crowded years in the life of young Jim Simmons, from the age of ten to thirteen. His rapidly growing knowledge of life arises from his deep affection for his unstable, gambling father, who is at the same time a brilliant journalist, and for his beautiful mother, thwarted in her endeavor to make a quiet, happy home for her footloose husband and little son. The growing boy, abnormally sensitive, is constantly watching and trying to understand his parents. After his father leaves for the War, as a correspondent, and the happy triumvirate of the family is disrupted, Jim’s life is bound up with that of his mother and subject to painful and conflicting emotions. The author shows the unceasing emotional tension of a deeply affectionate and sensitive boy, in a fresh and impressive manner.

The words of Jim’s mother, Diane, to his prospective second father, Ralph Howard, are significant. She is comparing older people to the young:

We’re dull . . . we’ve many feelings, and only one or two are really strong. Even they aren’t clear. . . . With Jim they’re all strong and they’re all too clear.

In detail the book is so vivid as to suggest that, like most first novels, it draws heavily upon childhood recollections. The impressions of childhood are the sharpest, and it is only when a novelist is forced by his material to write imaginatively of situations and states of mind of which he himself has no such indelible memories that we can really measure his achievement. A number of first books, drawing largely upon youthful impressions, have failed to be followed by work of wider range. We do not believe this will occur in the case of Mr. Guerard.

The scene of the story shifts from Deer-ing, Iowa, to Carmel, California, to Paris, to Davos. Jim’s father, Fritz, lovable, and reckless; his mother, gallant and loyal; and various minor characters, are well studied, though one important character, that of Ralph Howard, never really seems to come to life. Mr. Guerard writes with clarity, economy of means, a sense of drama, and a sense of structure. He has an interesting story to tell. His style is not altogether formed as yet; he has a tendency to explain, though briefly, what

the characters felt or thought in certain situations, instead of making it altogether apparent in their actions and words. And sometimes when he strives to be effective through terseness, he succeeds merely in being rather clumsily blunt. But these are, after all, minor faults. With his equipment, Mr. Guerard should advance to even more significant stories. As it is, he has written, out of a gifted imagination and with commendable craftsmanship, a story of sensitive boyhood that is sympathetic without being mawkish.

Prejudice in Peking

LIKE WATER FLOWING. By Margaret Mackprang Mackay. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock (a John Day Book). 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CARL CROW

LINDA HEYWOOD, the charming daughter of a New England father and a Chinese mother, was dancing on the moonlit roof of one of the famous hotels of Peking. It was the happiest day of her young and vigorous life, for she had just become engaged to Lieutenant Ronald Fenwick of the British army. With the black walls of Peking, the silhouette of the Western Hills against the blue of the Peking sky, the moonlight, the gay chatter of the cosmopolitan crowd, the setting for Linda’s moment of happiness was complete. Then she heard some people at the next table talking about her. The dread word “Eurasian” was used and the spell was broken.

Linda had fallen the victim of the cruel prejudices against those of mixed blood—a prejudice which has been responsible for countless tragedies in the Far East. The instinct of racial purity is universal, but falls with special cruelty on the Eurasian who lives on the China Coast. The Chinese mother may be socially acceptable. The American or British father may be of distinguished ancestry. But their children are social outcasts who may be tolerated by a few but move within a narrow and limited circle. Even in men’s clubs the Eurasian finds it difficult to gain membership and in many they are excluded entirely. This is in spite of the fact that many have but a touch of Oriental blood and cannot be distinguished from the native born American or Englishman.

Linda struggled against this wall of prejudice, but in vain. The cruel and uncharitable hand of social convention was against her. Miss Mackay has told the tragic story of the Eurasian with sympathy and understanding. She has done more than that, for she has, with a genius for vivid phrases, painted an interesting and accurate picture of Peking. Anyone who has ever lived there will recognize at once the genuineness of the characters who move with unhurried steps through the interesting story.