

## Letters to the Editor: *On Reading a Classic in Foreign Lands*

### Travels of Hajji Baba

SIR:—Hajji Baba "is best read as pure enjoyment, little by little, and over an extended period."

Thanks to a friend with whom I lived in China and who has given me the splendid Random House edition, so handsomely illustrated by Baldrige, Hajji Baba lives again in my home. I can conceive of no choice which would bring as much enjoyment, a little at a time, as Morier's classic.

Leaving London for Paris on St. Catherine's Day, 1924, I picked up "a copy of Hajji (in the minuscule World's Classics edition edited by Mr. C. W. Stewart)," partly to pass the time en route to the boulevards where the Catherinettes, that night, would dance and kiss but also because it seemed worth while to celebrate the centenary of the novel by owning it. My path had often crossed that of Hajji Baba but, like yourself, I had never read the volume through.

That pocket-size friend often traveled with me after that but my next entry inside the cover was "Reading it at Leninakan, Armenia: July 25, 1926."

Later entries are "Reading it on a 'hard seat' train to Mineralnye Vodi, Aug. 6, 1926. Reading the chapter (XXXVII) on Mariam's jump from the Serdar's palace at Erivan (now Yerevan) Sept. 25, 1926. Reading it at Angora (Ankara), Turkey, Dec. 2, 1927. Reading it at Broussa at start of Anatolia trip, Oct. 5, 1928. Reading it on the Bosphorus the day after the ice blockade of March 1, 1929. Reading it on Meshed, May 17, 1931. Reading it at Peking after crossing Asia on Citroën-Haardt Expedition, Feb. 14, 1932."

One reason for this constant companionship along the trail of Hajji Baba, Marco Polo, and the Silk Route was the small size of the Humphrey Milford edition. But "pure enjoyment over an extended period" is reason enough.

It is not likely that many Americans have read "Hajji Baba" from one edge of Asia to the other for only three have ever made the complete crossing from the Mediterranean to the Yellow Sea and the minuscule edition was not published in time for Allen and Sachtleben to carry it across Asia on their bicycles in 1919 to 22.

The pleasure of reading Hajji Baba at Tehran; at Kabul; at Tokat, where Peregrine Persic met the Hajj; at Constantinople, where Morier served as diplomat, and at Smyrna, where he was born, has been such that I echo your reverent sentiment, "I kiss your knee."

Not that all this matters a darn. But it does indicate that Hajji Baba still has honor in his own country.

Thanks to the clairvoyant art of that persistent student and traveler, Cyrus Le Roy Baldrige, and the skill of the Had-don Craftsmen, Hajji Baba now swaggers forth in the best dress he ever knew. Thus presented, he should rival Mickey Mouse, or "swing," as a "fashionable tonic."

*Salaam aleikum, ya Sidi!*

MAYNARD OWEN WILLIAMS  
Washington, D. C.



"This speed-up is killing my style!"

### In Reply to Mr. Embree

SIR:—Your recent article, "Can College Graduates Read?", by E. R. Embree is a negative answer to the question based on a Carnegie report on the schools and colleges of Pennsylvania. On the whole the writer's thesis is a challenge to the profession of teaching. None of its membership receive commendatory statements except men who had taught Mr. Embree at Yale. One judges from his paper that the profession has done and is doing nothing to correct conditions which the writer describes.

Without long study and investigation no teacher in the ranks would attempt to discuss the accuracy of a Carnegie report or to make a categorical statement on the fairness of Mr. Embree's sampling of the work of the elementary schools. However, she is safe in saying that he does not appear to be familiar with a large section of professional literature. He overlooks the work of educators of the type of H. C. Morrison of Chicago and the late H. L. Miller of Wisconsin who advocated doing away with the traditional "lesson-learning, lesson-hearing" type of school procedure. For many years school systems have attempted, within the scope of their facilities, to provide for individual differences among students. The recent, far-reaching Center-Persons study is the culmination of educators' understanding of the importance of remedial reading. Most school systems today provide for a procedure of life guidance for young people in order to prevent aimless rote learning and "course" teaching.

It is to be admitted that secondary and elementary schools have been more ready to adopt new procedures than the more slowly-moving colleges and universities. However, the first two items of the four-point program advocated by the Carnegie report and Mr. Embree are already well under way at the University

of Wisconsin which carries on a careful prognosis of high school seniors in the state and has ample facilities to assist its own students in making a tentative forecast of their achievement. This same Middle Western university through its history has guided its students in using libraries and laboratories in order that life may be made more full.

THERESA LITTLE.

Milwaukee, Wis.

### A Good Latin Word

SIR:—In a review of Oliver St. John Gogarty's "I Follow St. Patrick" which appeared in this week's S.R.L., Mr. Ernest Boyd writes as follows: "... I learned something vastly more interesting to American readers, to wit, that the strangest thing about the banner 'with a strange device' was the word 'Excelsior.'" "There is no such word in Latin. . . . It may have been 'altius' Longfellow was trying to say." Thus a learned priest, Father Paddy. Well, Father, the comparative of *excelsus* is *excelsior*, according to Cicero, and the comparative of *altus* is *altior*, according to Cicero, Vergil, and Quintilian. What sort of word is *altius*?

Well, Mr. Boyd, if you really want to know, *altius* is the same sort of word as *excelsior* and *altior*; to wit, a perfectly good Latin word employed, among others, by Pliny, Martial, Sallust, Vergil, Seneca, Quintilian, Tacitus, and Cicero. True it is a comparative adverb, not a comparative adjective, and the cleric you sought to stand in the corner may have been either pedantic or mistaken in thinking an adverb preferable to an adjective in the context, as he was certainly mistaken in finding *excelsior* not Latin. But you can check the Latinity of *altius* by referring to any first year Latin text that contains the usual number of paradigms.

A FIRST FORM LATIN PUPIL.

## John Bull's Own Island

WITH MALICE TOWARD SOME. By Margaret Halsey. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1938. \$2.00.

Reviewed by ANGELICA GIBBS

NOT very long ago a young American spent a year in England, on an exchange professorship at a small college. It is probably just as well that the people of the small Devonshire town in which he settled did not know that his wife was the possessor of a notebook and of a fountain pen which leaked vitriol from every pore. The fact of the notebook would not have disturbed them in the least, but it would have been a pity to have blurred by the least tinge of self-consciousness the portraits which finally emerged from it.

Here, in diary form, is England in general and English village life in particular, set down in a typically American manner. It would not be quite fair to call it a series of wisecracks, although Margaret Halsey is addicted, to put it mildly, to this particular brand of humor. She is a very keen observer, and so thoroughly averse to putting her observations into plain language, that at times her sentences almost break down under their load of bright new similes.

Perhaps this is all to the good, since the subjects she takes up are ones about which Americans have been whimpering from the time that the first visiting Yankee was exposed to the British version of civilization. English food, English conversation, the clothes that Englishwomen wear, and the way they treat their servants, the sad and funny aspects of the caste system in a small village, and the English talent for evasion in the face of anything unpleasant have all been criticized before, just as the serene tempo of British life, and the beauty of the countryside have been praised. All of these things are reiterated here, but somehow they manage to sound brand new; partly because Margaret Halsey hasn't an ounce of the snobbish awe which many Americans try to conceal when they write satiric sketches about England, and partly because she has a real talent for acidly photographic thumbnail sketches of the people she meets.

She is at her best—and least pixie—when she breaks loose from village life and tells of the trips she and her husband took on their vacations; tours of the cathedral towns, a week in London, a short visit to Norway and Sweden (the latter under the competent if rather glum auspices of a young guide who was “suffering a natural reaction from meeting

three boatloads a day of Mr. Childs's readers”); and a Christmas in Paris. These parts of the book prove that she can be straightforward, very funny, and often just as informative as a guidebook, if in a slightly unorthodox way, since her information is of the variety which is likely to be remembered long after the facts in a guidebook have collapsed under their own weight.

## A Beguiling Novel

NIGHTINGALE WOOD. By Stella Gibbons. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MABEL S. ULRICH

“COLD Comfort Farm” was hailed by its discoverers as the most delightful bit of ironic spoofing that had appeared in many a day. In this,

Miss Gibbons's latest book, the spoofing is less obvious, but the story's appeal I think should be wider, and certainly no one need fear that her satiric wit has lost any of its edge.

The scene of the tale is Sible Pelden, a typical English village. Here, retired in dreary comfort, live an appalling old-fashioned father, his brow-beaten wife, and their two repressed maiden daughters—a family now forced to offer board and

shelter to the widow of their tasteless son. In the village lives also a snobbish county family whose heir is the Prince Charming of the dreams of the proletariat and capitalist maids alike; and filling in the interstices of middle-class and gentry is the group of villagers—always lively, and often bawdy.

The theme is—deliberately of course—the old Cinderella one; the main plot that was so often chosen by the Victorian “Duchess” and her ilk. Viola, foolish and most feminine little shop-girl, after many vicissitudes wins away from his heartless fiancée the hand and fortune of her dream prince. But Miss Gibbons, with impish guile, has used this slender thread on which to suspend a galaxy of characters through whom she can ridicule with penetrating wit a host of English institutions. She has a beautiful time with Victorian middle-class meanness, Freudian elaboratenesses, the pseudo-aristocracy and snobbery of the post-war rich, the British brand of male conceit, the horrors of the ultra-respectable English tea-party; and against these she opposes the heartening earthiness and gusto of the common folk. And there are moments

when Miss Gibbons drops her satire and gives us a glimpse of a tender as well as an understanding heart, as in the poignant love of fading, thirty-plus Tina for the youthful chauffeur, Saxon.

If Miss Gibbons's eyes seem at times to have some of the disconcerting quality of X-rays, the fact that they are always tilted in laughter prevents even her malicious observations from becoming formidable. Her talent is that of a born cartoonist. Like the cartoon artist she can spot human folly even when it skulks many inches below the surface and like him the apparent simplicity of her art may well be deceptive.

It is possible therefore for the casual reader to ignore much of the satire and still find “Nightingale Wood” an amusing novel. It has plenty of action, is sufficiently sexy, and has a delightfully happy ending. To the sophisticated reader it offers an evening's entertainment enlivened by many chuckles and the pleasures of contact with a brilliant, streamlined young mind.

## Salvation by Deed

MR. DESPONDENCY'S DAUGHTER. By Anne Parrish. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1938. \$2.50.

WE have it on authority that no man by taking thought can add a cubit to his stature, but Miss Parrish writes of a woman who did just that. Her clinging selfishness (unconscious, to be sure) had successively ruined the lives of her father, her governess, her husband, her maid, her best friends, and her children; but at sixty she psychoanalyzed herself, regenerated herself, and saved her soul—though too late to do much good to anybody else.

How probable this is, whether the shock of hearing herself described as “a woman who had once been beautiful” would have been enough to detonate such far-reaching reforms, is a problem for psychiatrists. The lay reader foreseeing in the first few pages what is going to happen (or even earlier if he reads the jacket), will be chiefly interested in the skill with which Miss Parrish gradually creates sympathy for a woman who, objectively regarded, was the most poisonous type of refined and godly bitch. But it doesn't seem quite fair to throw the blame back on her

father, who had brought her up wrong. Who brought father up wrong? Or his father?—and so on, ad infinitum. If Thou shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand? But if Thou shouldst accept alibis, O Lord, who hasn't got one? A society that cannot run on alibis has to make some discriminations if it would survive.



Margaret Halsey



Stella Gibbons