

experience to three-dimensional terms. As immortal beings, we are "such stuff as dreams are made on."

One last point, to reply to the inevitable question about free will. Dunne holds, reasonably I think, that for Observer One his experiences along Time One are "determined," but that a higher Observer can intervene, within the limits of the fact that our various fields of action and attention are shared with our fellow beings. It has been obvious for a long time that the Free Will-Determinism argument had arrived at a stalemate because we did not really understand the nature of our lives. Dunne's contribution seems to me as reasonable as it is original. What he must not be asked for is a completely intelligible account of the whole vast and elaborate process. We might as well have asked Columbus for an ordinance survey of the whole New World.

Here then is a book that nobody with a grain of intellectual curiosity can afford to ignore. And do not be put off because the American publishers, in their unwisdom, have seen fit to give it a hideous format that looks like all the High School algebras I have ever seen.

J. B. Priestley's play, "*Time and the Conways*," recently on the New York stage and now published in book form, is based upon Dunne's theory of time.

## Divided Family

ONE MINUS TWO. By Henri Troyat. New York: Ives Washburn. 1938. \$2.

**A** GALIC writer new to English and American readers is presented in this brief but telling study of family jealousy among the cabotins. In spite of poverty, the down-at-heel actor hero is happy because he possesses an adoring wife who assures him nightly that his performance in some trumpery farce has equalled Mounet-Sully at his best. But when the couple are precipitated into notoriety and comparative opulence as the parents of a child film star, the father finds himself resenting his son's early, untrained success. His wife's adoration is transferred to the child. As a result, though previously faithful, he feels impelled to run off on tour with a mistress, is miserable with her, and returns thankfully to Paris, only to discover that even with his son's precocious period of success already a thing of the past, the emotional balance cannot be restored. Father definitely hates son in the now divided family.

The narrative method in M. Troyat's book is straightforward and the treatment unaffected, tending towards a naturalistic appeal of the simpler sort. The characters are convincingly drawn, and there are many good details of life backstage and in the studios. With a little more irony this might have been a distinguished novel. As it is, however, the book is well planned and effective, if never of unusual subtlety or power.

# Invitation to the Country

R. F. D. By Charles Allen Smart. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

**O**AK HILL is not Walden Pond and Charles Allen Smart is not Henry David Thoreau, but I wonder if this stout, humorous, and moving book is not as important to this America as what Thoreau wrote was to that of his time and his writing. Mr. Smart has done a splendid thing. Only obviously has he written the richly detailed record of the return to the land of the educated, literary, urban American. His is no mere country book. Far more important than that, he has given us the story of growth beyond books and schoolrooms to understanding, to satisfaction, to a wise and creative fatalism on the American earth.

That land, undoubtedly, provides the details for the relation by Charles Allen Smart of the education of Charles Allen Smart. But I wondered, as I got from his pages the smell of manure and hay and working men, whether that educational process was wholly a matter of the closeness of all life to planting and birth, growing and dying, labor and fruit. I suspected that this educational process was already in motion in him when he was engaged in the unappealing task of teaching rich men's sons to become bogus English gentleman, long before he went with his Peggy to the house in which his people had lived on the land from which they took their living. Certainly the humility and high spirits which he took back to Ross County, Ohio, are as essential to this story as any of the rural events within it. He was already equipped for his cash crop of writing; his learning lit experience without stiffening him before new and strange attitudes and tasks. Not animal obstetrics, nor the vagaries of

weather or of hired men, nor any of the aspects of his country living seemed to me to be quite so important as the personality and the spirit which Charles Smart brought to them. I wondered even if, granted a Smart, such a development of the American might not also take place in the town, perhaps not in the great cities, sterilized by specialization, but in smaller American cities where life is still to be seen relatively whole.

Such seeing is the book's essence. Mr. Smart is a man who regards both the sky and the dirt and everything between and sees them free of preconception or dogmatism. That is a quality rare now, town or country; it is closer to the shrewd, unrestricted looking of older times than to the microscopic scrutiny of limited fields so common in our years and in our cities. We have learned to see so little well and much not at all. What Mr. Smart has done is not to discover the land, but to find the possibility of wholeness upon it.

I wish, without believing it, that "R. F. D." might be not merely one man's way but a lantern for the feet of others. So much has been written about young malcontents, such as Mr. Smart says he was, seeking escapes for themselves after John Reed and Nicolai Lenin and some others. By Mr. Smart's narrative such flights seem as irrelevant as alien. He has gone straight and safe, though not in ease, between pencil and sheepfold and between fancy farming and squalid grubbing to peaceful, even joyous, understanding of his place between the soil and the stars. I hope a best seller, such as this book already promises to be, will not disturb it but I wonder if a good price for his wool clip might not have better served serenity in Ross County. Fame, as is notorious, is strong drink for farmer—or philosopher. Fortunately Mr. Smart is both.



CHARLES ALLEN SMART AT OAK HILL, HIS OHIO FARM


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## Those Who Can, Write

"HE who can, does. He who cannot, teaches." Thus the Bernard Shaw of 1903, in "Maxims for Revolutionists," which was an appendix to "The Revolutionist's Handbook," which was a supplement to "Man and Superman." By 1938, in "An Odor of Verbena," which is the coda of "The Unvanquished," Mr. Faulkner has made it: "I realized then the immitigable chasm between all life and all print—that those who can, do; those who cannot and suffer enough because they can't, write about it." And last fall when Mr. Hemingway wanted an epithet which would distill the quintessence of contempt, he achieved, "You writer!" He used it in a passage where its direct reference was sexual impotence, but the rest of the book made clear that writers are impotent in every other way as well. From 1903 to 1938, from peak to valley, thirty-five years. The period might be captioned: collapse of an eidolon.

For Mr. Shaw was also talking about writers—or, more generically, about The Artist. In his day it was the professor who was impotent—it was the writer who could. He was the inheritor of a notion which runs at least as far back as Shelley's "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," and which had its greatest flowering and acceptance during Mr. Shaw's impressionable years. Those were the years when The Artist cherished the highest valuation of himself he has ever been able to believe in, the years of Whistler's white forelock and lawsuits and "Gentle Art of Making Enemies," of *The Yellow Book* and the innumerable salons that were its sanctuary, of Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man under Socialism" which showed how art was going to remake society far more confidently than the Writers' Congress has been able to and in far better prose, of William Morris's more practicable revolution by means of wallpapers and book-bindings, of the fag end of Ruskin and the high noon of the Fabians and the earliest daybreak of H. G. Wells.

That was a time when The Artist was much more than anyone else; when he

was, above all, generative. But in the current *Atlantic Monthly* Mr. Edmund Wilson obliquely expresses the modern contempt of literature by reproaching Mr. Shaw for being primarily The Artist. Mr. Wilson's allegation is not new. Mr. J. B. Collis's book of more than fifteen years ago made the same point, and Shaw himself has elaborated it over hundreds of autobiographical pages. But the thirty-five years of our caption have marked a complete overturn, and whereas Mr. Shaw and Mr. Collis thought of The Artist as generative, Mr. Wilson, in the latest manner, thinks of him as impotent. You see, very little legislation, acknowledged or unacknowledged, has Shaw's name on it; he has only written. Those who can, do; those who cannot, write.

A vocational neurosis of literary people is a compulsion to foul their own nest. Though it may show more varied symptoms today, it has always existed. Every Dick Roe of your acquaintance (we shall soon return to *Romans à Clef*, which also bears on this question) can tell you how barren and infertile are the ideas in Jack Doe's books, though Dick is confident that his own books are pretty seminal. But at this first step one avenue leads off straight to despair. For, armored in whatever humility to begin with, the Dick Roes of our literature could not help getting the idea that they are important. Look at the way people admire them, value their autographs, defer to their opinions, put them on programs, crowd to cocktail parties for a glimpse of them, and buy their books in such quantities that they must pay twice the income tax of a college president and ten times that of an astrophysicist. But that evidence carries a self-contained depth-bomb, for the income tax of a prize-fighter or an ice-skater is many times larger still, the crowds round a radio warbler are much more populous, and however the people may defer to the opinions of a writer they are far more deferent to those of an acquitted murderer, a halfback, or a movie star. And despair comes nearer still when the writer realizes that, after preaching repentance and reform to the people for thirty years, he has had no effect on them whatever.

Look at American society for the past generation. Incalculable energies have worked on it, unimaginable changes have been wrought in it—and writers have been a mere surface froth borne along by the energies, mere blobs of inert matter which have had changes inflicted on them but have had no active part in change. They have been ancestral voices prophesying wars: no one has heeded them and the wrong wars have come. They have been seers of visions beholding the good life and the great society for all men to bow down and worship them: the great society has never appeared and not a single knee has been crooked. Wars have come and gone, dynasties have fallen, despotisms have risen, the Dow-Jones average has climbed

to 500 and sunk to minus-10: Dick Roe has tried to legislate about all these and has changed no vote but his own. This is the taste of quinine in the mouth of any Roe, but worst of all for those who have been making the revolution.

This seems to be the road-map to despair. The deputy sheriff, the Brain Truster, the union organizer have done something. The retailer, the health officer, the laboratory technician, the civil engineer, the county superintendent of schools have done something—moved something from here to there—modified a graph or index—changed a vote. But in moments when a gale blows out of the north, when the writer looks round him and sees a rip tide rising which he has neither set in motion nor added to, which he cannot control, which can control him—he feels as if his career has been only a vaudeville act, only a sedative for the leisure of fools, only something in a cage that people look at with some amusement on Sunday afternoons in Spring. And so, today's revulsion, the death wish, the cry of immolation: you *castrato*, you writer!

Why yes, writers are entitled to their portion of today's despair. Doubtless any man who faces the modern world with hope, who whistles along the broken arch, has more folly in him than can be admired. But the generality of mankind go about their business with something of resolution and fortitude, and especially with something of business pride. During the deluge and after it they will do the same; the gates of hell itself shall not prevail against them. It is possible that lobbyists and union organizers and garage mechanics are a tougher breed than writers; it is certain that they do not damn their own trades as impotent. And it is certain that literature's present self-revulsion is a compensation for an earlier and outrageous overvaluation. Perhaps we must breed selectively a new species of writers. They will have a humbler and more realistic idea of what literature can do—but they will also do their jobs with satisfaction and even with pride. It may have nothing to do with legislation, it may only be the job of using a cracked and aberrant lens to enregister chaos on paper. But they will do it without tearing their bowels in an agony of expiation. They will do it without tears, without despair. Those who can, will write.

## Announcement

*The Saturday Review of Literature* announces the resignation, effective March 1, 1938, of Bernard DeVoto as Editor of the magazine. Mr. DeVoto is retiring in order to give his time to writing and literary research. The new Editor will be George Stevens, who has been Managing Editor of *The Saturday Review* since 1933. Mr. DeVoto will continue to be a frequent and valued contributor to the magazine, in so far as his other commitments will allow.