

Rousseau's Self-Portrait

THE CONFESSIONS OF J. J. ROUSSEAU. Revised and completed by A. S. B. Glover. London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938. 2 vols. \$22.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

THESE two handsome volumes, bound in unpolished calf, with tasteful wood-engravings by Reynolds Stone, contain a reprint of the anonymous contemporary translation first published in two parts in 1783 and 1790. Mr. A. S. B. Glover has revised and completed the translation and added some useful notes, but he has preserved its eighteenth century quality, which has made of it one of the standard English translations of a French classic. In an appreciative yet critical introduction, Havelock Ellis sets the work in the perspective of the author's life and times, and occasionally corrects some of the self-labors for which Rousseau made himself alone responsible by inserting them in these Confessions. Mr. Ellis states, for example, that it is extremely doubtful whether Rousseau was or could have been the father of the children whom he allegedly placed in a foundling hospital.

From Voltaire to Irving Babbitt the opponents of Rousseau have been numerous, yet his influence has concededly been enormous, affecting such diverse figures as Kant, Wordsworth, Thomas Paine, Schiller, Robespierre, and more naturally, Chateaubriand, and Byron. Few people nowadays read "Emile" or "The Social Contract," and many will find it hard to believe that the early years of the nineteenth century owed more to Rousseau than to his only, but much greater, competitor of the eighteenth century, Voltaire. Voltaire's appeal was to the mind rather than to the emotions, whereas Rousseau was all emotion, a violent reaction against eighteenth century rationalism, and the inevitable father of the Romantic Movement. When he tried to reason, he was childish, as his preposterous "Lettre sur les Spectacles" and his socio-philosophical writings show. Hence the survival of these Confessions as his masterpiece. He could present ideas only in terms of actual living.

It would, however, be difficult to find a life that more miserably failed to realize his theories than Rousseau's. "A plebeian and a fool," Brunetière called him, and so he seemed to his contemporaries and to all the host of his posthumous denigrators whose findings were duly collated in Babbitt's "Rousseau and Romanticism." He was a liar and a thief, a coward and a lackey. He quarreled with his best friends and benefactors, Diderot, Mme. d'Epinay, Baron Grimm, and even Hume, after he came to England. After living with an illiterate kitchen-maid called Theresa Le Vasseur

for twenty-five years, he married her, imagined (according to Ellis) that he was the father of her five children, and was neglected by her in favor of a stable-boy. Theresa was overfond of the bottle and took not the faintest interest in his (to her) incomprehensible work. Yet even in these Confessions he refers to her as a paragon of Nature's unspoiled simplicity.

What is in this work and in the general teaching of Rousseau that has exercised such an influence? In the Confessions specifically we have not only, as Rousseau claimed for it, the first absolutely sincere self-portrait in literature, but also, as Ellis says, an early effort at what might by a stretch of language be described as psychoanalysis. Factually his account of himself is frequently wrong in detail, but the effect upon him of his various experiences from childhood onwards is convincingly expounded and lucidly analyzed. Despite his temporary conversion to Catholicism, for purely opportunistic reasons, Rousseau was too profoundly Calvinist to lose his essential Protestantism. No Catholic could have written the Confessions. They have just that suspicion of evangelical self-righteousness in the admission of wrong-doing which is characteristic of so many sinners at revival meetings.

It was Byron who wrote of the only rival volume of Confessions:

Saint Augustine in his confessions,
Makes the reader envy his Transgressions.

That is not true of Rousseau. No one will envy him his petty vices or his obviously masochistic pleasure in corporal punishment. What one is expected to do is to contemplate the wicked sinner who always means so well and whose true instincts are thwarted by the malign machinations of society. "Man is good, but men are bad." The genesis in himself of all his theories of government, education, and religion, is here. He humanized the theories of Locke and Montesquieu and expressed them in a form very close to that adopted by the nineteenth century humanitarians when they attempted to bring their message to the people. His doctrine is essentially that which still lies at the root of Protestant democracy, the rights of the individual, an unbounded belief in the perfectibility of the common man.

In "The Social Contract" Rousseau attempted to resolve the problem of individual happiness within the framework of a social state. This work could be quoted to their advantage by all parties, and his characteristic comment was that "they who boast that they understand the whole of it are cleverer than I am." As I have said, it is in his Confessions rather than in his theoretically more abstract writings that the quintessence of

Rousseauism is found. That he himself foresaw this is evident from a passage in one of his dialogues, which explicitly states that without a knowledge of the man himself his doctrines are obscure. "I dwell less," says the interlocutor, "on a direct examination of this doctrine than on its relation to the character of the man whose name it bore. . . . In short, it was necessary for a man to portray himself in order thus to display primitive man, and if the author had not been as unusual as his books, he would never have written them. . . . If you had not described your Jean-Jacques for me, I should have believed that natural man no longer existed." At least all can agree that the Confessions of Rousseau is the unforgettable portrait of a very natural man.

Life in Latin Poetry

THREE ROMAN POETS: Plautus, Catullus, Ovid. By F. A. Wright. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$2.65.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

THIS scholarly but highly readable volume by Professor Wright, late of the University of London, is an excellent advertisement for what are discouragingly termed the classics. He skips the major classical authors—Lucretius, Horace, Vergil—because they led fairly calm lives and aimed at moral uplift; and discusses, instead three men who experienced plenty of vicissitudes and two of whom aimed only at entertaining the customers. With Professor Wright's judgment of Catullus this reviewer continues to disagree; Plautus and Ovid may have been content to "make their readers smile," but the work by which Catullus is remembered was mostly aimed at individual readers, and he wanted to make them yelp. (As they all did, except Caesar.) But anybody who cares about Catullus will find here a thorough biography and a highly intelligent critique.

Still more entertaining are Professor Wright's discussions of Ovid, the Scott Fitzgerald of Rome, who wrote a whole book about the (highly exaggerated) miseries of exile in a town which has since named its principal square for him; a town which he would find no bad substitute for Baiae if he went there now. And above all of Plautus, the ex-actor who had to turn his hand to playwriting when he was demobilized, and suited his plays to the taste of a post-war world hungry for normalcy and amusement. He seems to have invented rhyme and he practically invented Italian literature; which, after several centuries of distraction by an effort to imitate the Greeks, finally came back to the Plautine characters and language.

Copious specimens of the works of all the authors are given in translation, and even readers with no interest in Latin poetry will enjoy Mr. Wright's dry comments on ancient and modern society.

The Trail of the Hawkeye

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cago. By 1908 both Dell and Hansen were Chicago newspapermen. The careers of Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook are sufficiently well known. Susan Glaspell's plays, Cook's brilliant conversational ability and magnetic personality, their elevation of the Little Theater into something live and strong, belong not to the literary history of Iowa, but to that of the United States. Nevertheless, the works of these two are among Iowa's proudest possessions, and they will still show you the place where George Cram Cook had a vision in the library stacks at Iowa City. "The Road to the Temple" begins, Iowans will tell you, on the banks of the Mississippi.

Here are two important writers and an original idea out of Iowa. They come out of Davenport, but they don't happen there. In that generation the Iowa writer was still a migratory bird, laying her eggs a long way from her birthplace.

One might add to these any number of other wanderers, of the Glaspell-Cook generation and later. Carl Van Vechten was born in Cedar Rapids, but has spent his mature life in New York. When he finally, after numerous books on cats, Spanish music, theatrical history and appreciation, and the like, returned to Iowa for fictional material, the result was "The Tattooed Countess," banned from the Cedar Rapids library. That book, like many another, is a satirical picture of the dullness, stupidity, smugness, fatuity, and all-around clod-hopperishness of the Iowa town. It is part of the revolt from the village.

The sun never sets on wandering Iowa authors. "The Able McLaughlins," Harper Prize novel in 1923, Pulitzer Prize in 1924, stems from Traer, Iowa, via India, where Margaret Wilson spent several years as a missionary. And the whole stream of James Norman Hall's books, ending in the Bounty trilogy and "Hurricane," is a product of Colfax, Iowa, by way of England, France, the Lafayette Escadrille, and the South Seas. Josephine Herbst I have already mentioned. Rupert Hughes, by virtue of a boyhood spent in Keokuk, has had his five foot shelf of writings placed in the Iowa collections.

Of the post-war generation of writers in Iowa it is possible to say this with confidence: they consistently choose to utilize the materials of their local environment for fiction and poetry, and they show an increasing willingness to live in the state they were born in. Iowa has become as fit a subject for books, and as reputable a state for a writer to live in, as any other. If there is a slight hysteria accompanying the liberation, it can be understood, and it will pass. Cultural regionalism is the philosophy of many Iowa writers today, but the movement is liberalizing rather than the reverse. In a society moving toward complete industrial regimentation there is a profound

need for the preservation of healthy provincialisms, as Josiah Royce pointed out as far back as 1902.

Properly to understand the background of the writings of Ruth Suckow, Phil Stong, Tom Duncan, Paul Engle, Winifred Van Etten, James Hearst, Jay G. Sigmund, and a good many more, we must go back to 1915, to Iowa City. In that year and that small university town, John Towner Frederick, then an undergraduate, conceived, and with the help of professors and others brought out, a little magazine called *The Midland*, dedicated to furnishing an outlet for honest and serious writing about the Middle West. This, the first of the little magazines with a regional aim, achieved in eighteen years a reputation far out of proportion to its expensiveness or appearance. In an article in *American Prefaces* some weeks ago Charles Allen lists a few of the "discoveries" made in the height of *The Midland's* career. Among the Iowans Mr. Allen notices MacKinlay Kantor, Paul Engle, Phil Stong, James Hearst, and Marquis Childs (the latter a student at Iowa at the time). Others include James Farrell, David Cornel De Jong, Albert Halper, and Clifford Bragdon.

In effect, John T. Frederick and his friends on *The Midland* did for fiction, through the little magazine, what Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook had done for drama through the little theater. But the regional flavor not only of Frederick's magazine but of his own novels ("Druida," "The Green Bush," "The Stockade"), and the fact that his work had been done in and for Iowa and the Middle West, have made this unselfish and helpful critic and editor the greatest single force in Iowa letters in the past twenty-five years.

I have mentioned some of the writers who owe to John T. Frederick much of their confidence in dealing with local materials. There is another man, Lewis Worthington Smith, a professor at Drake University, to whom a whole group of Des Moines youngsters owe much. Smith, a poet, critic, and editor himself, kept alive an interest in writing at Drake for many years, until it finally flowered in a number of nationally known writers. Phil Stong, whose "State Fair" was a kind of triumph of simple localism, is one of that group, and though he chooses to live in Connecticut, his choice of Iowa as a locale for stories and novels has been consistent and sympathetic. Similarly Tom Duncan, author of "Oh Chautauqua!" and several volumes of sturdy verse, made use in his novel of the rural entertainments of Iowa. State fairs and chautauquas, Iowa hogs and Iowa countrymen in their square-toed Sunday best, belong to the same category as Ruth Suckow's "Iowa Interiors," "The Odyssey of a Nice Girl," "Country People," and "The Kramer Girls." They are part of the literary awakening to which James Hearst's "Countrymen," Paul Engle's "American Song," Winifred Van Etten's

"I Am the Fox," and Margaret Wilson's "The Able McLaughlins" belong. Artistically, this awakening in literature is paralleled by the regional painting of Grant Wood, now professor of art at the University of Iowa.

One other writer, properly a member of the Des Moines group, must be mentioned. He is MacKinlay Kantor, who though never a student at Drake and never under Smith's direct influence, associated himself with Tom Duncan and the other writers of the capital. Kantor has never exercised himself too much over Iowa materials. From his youth upward he has been fascinated by Civil War stories, and his writing has leaned in that direction. But he got his start by winning a short story contest sponsored by the Des Moines Register; he worked on newspapers in Webster City and Des Moines; he lived for a time in an abandoned farm house and wrote furiously. "Diversey," "El Goes South," and "The Jaybird" gave him something of a reputation. "Long Remember" and "The Voice of Bugle Ann" clinched it. Without ploughing as earnestly as Phil Stong and Tom Duncan in the Iowa soil, Kantor is an integral part of that Des Moines group.

And this brings us to a second literary "movement" in Iowa—or rather, to a continuation of the one begun by Frederick, Edwin Ford Piper, Frank Luther Mott, and others. This movement, centered like the first in Iowa City, is built around the School of Letters, directed by Norman Foerster. Aiming at offering a broad education in the humanities, the School of Letters from its inception in 1930 has encouraged creative writing. One result has been the development of a group that may in time become as well known as the Davenport group of a generation before.

Even in the twenties, it was possible for students at Iowa to obtain higher degrees with imaginative theses. Only one, however, tried it. Josephine Donovan offered her novel, "Black Earth," as a Master's thesis in 1929. It was accepted, but before she could finish the degree the novel was bought for publication, won a two-thousand-dollar prize, and was being dickered for by the movies. So Miss Donovan lost interest in the academic M.A. But after 1930 the creative thesis was expanded into a planned system. Edwin Ford Piper began to be flooded with volumes of verse, collections of stories, novels. Paul Engle and Richard Maibaum were among the first experimental cluster of student writers. In all, there have been something over forty imaginative theses offered and accepted for both M.A. and Ph.D. degrees.

In 1935, feeling an increasing need for a magazine like the old *Midland*, the School of Letters and the Graduate College subsidized a periodical called *American Prefaces*, edited by Wilbur Schramm. *American Prefaces* has taken up where *The Midland* left off. It has maintained