



THE MEDUSA'S RAFT—PAINTING BY GERICAULT
From the jacket of "They Sailed for Senegal."

one which offers an infinitude of difficulties to the fictional narrator, who must concern himself with character in the midst of events so compelling that they tend to reduce all character to a pulp. Mr. MacArthur has triumphantly surmounted these difficulties. He has extracted every drop of juice from the records of the disaster, and has filled in the gaps with matter which is, if anything, better than the sources. The interviews between the vacillating de Chaumareys and his mistress, the half-sentences of the foreboding junior officers, are among the best things in the book. The author's method is dramatic; he has remorselessly discarded everything in the records that does not make good theater, and introduced whatever was necessary to bridge resulting gaps.

If one stops here, a point has been missed. Mr. MacArthur manages to keep his dramatics clicking because he is himself so interested in what makes these people act as they do, that he cannot stop to moralize or even to reflect. The conduct of a group of starving men on a beach under a hot sun may be despicable by armchair standards; but Mr. MacArthur is more interested in solving the question of what it is than that of what it should be. His approach is that of J.-H. Fabre to a colony of fruit-flies; and it is not till he has finished that we are allowed to realize that he has described a singularly unprepossessing set of scoundrels. The book is thus, in some sense, a *tour de force* that will hardly bear repetition. But one does not ask that a *tour de force* be repeated; only that it have consistency and self-contained excellence, and this "They Sailed for Senegal" has.

Fletcher Pratt is the author of a history of the U. S. Navy, which is shortly to be published.

Sparrow's Eye View

SPARROW FARM. By Hans Fallada.
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1938.
\$2.

Reviewed by S. A. Nock

THE little clerk turns into a sparrow, and flies off to meet his dangers and his love. We are happy to fly with him, and to share his troubles with the old witch, and the bad sorcerer, and the good magician, and the foundling who becomes a magpie—happy because we delight in fairy tales. Most of us were brought up on them, and regret that we can no longer have as good a time with Grimm and Andersen and others as we used to.

Consequently, when Hans Fallada gives us a fairy tale, one in the good old German tradition, in which the characters are people, we read it with delight. Gunttram and Asio and Bubo and the rest are individuals who are interesting in themselves; and what they do is perfectly satisfactory according to the requirements of a good fairy tale. Likewise, Eric Sutton's translation of the author's language is just right for the telling of a charming and amusing story.

The only trace of the Fallada we knew in "Little Man, What Now?" is in the criticism of humanity from the point of view of a sparrow. There is just enough of it to make us think a moment, and to chuckle over our own solemnity: then the fairy tale goes on, excitingly and beautifully. The German countryside, where all self-respecting fairy tales have their setting; the sorcerers and the witches on broomsticks and the enchanted cat, all are present. Here is that rarest of fictions, a fairy tale for grown-ups.

Sex, Just Sex

FORGIVE US OUR VIRTUES. By Vardis Fisher. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

ABOUT a dozen years ago Mr. Vardis Fisher discovered Sex, but he has not yet got over his naive astonishment at his own discovery. "Forgive Us Our Virtues" ("a novel that is too strong meat for eastern publishers" but that "has been printed just as Fisher wrote it, without a single deletion") is his latest report on this theme. Effete Easterners will discover from its fascinating pages that we are all sexually maladjusted.

I did not count the characters in Mr. Fisher's 347 pages, but I should guess there must be thirty or forty of them, and the staple of their conversation through the five parts into which the book is divided, is Sex. Just Sex. If on the Atlantic seaboard we are concerned about the depression or Austria or what is left of the New Deal, way out in Idaho they have greatly simplified life. There they drink indefinite cocktails and think about Sex all day long. It is true that even in Idaho men do not know how to fondle their women folks, and the result is that the women's club of Broom, Idaho, drives a pulchritudinous female psychoanalyst out of town. At least, she leaves, after what must be the most preposterous trial in fiction since the burlesque of Bardell versus Pickwick.

In the course of a conversation between the pulchritudinous psychoanalyst (who suffers from her own complexes) and a pleasing little ass named Ogden Greb (who suffers from his), there appears one sensible remark. While Mr. Greb is asking Miss Young whether she prefers to be called "sweetling," "sweet-sweet," "ducky beloved," or "tootlums," he is heard to say: "Lord, what a nuisance the unconscious mind is!"

Widespread as Sexual Maladjustment is, it can be cured. Mr. Greb and Sylvia show us how in Part V. Far out in an Idaho meadow Mr. Greb and his Sylvia are caught in a thunderstorm. With rare presence of mind, they immediately take off all their clothes, laugh like children, lie on their backs, and "let the fragrant rain drive upon them." I have not been rained on in Idaho, though I have been drenched in Colorado, and I do not recall that the rain was fragrant, but possibly they manage these things better in Senator Borah's commonwealth.

There seems to be no hope for us on the Atlantic seaboard. The number of places in which you can wander around naked with a female in a thunderstorm is so limited that I am afraid we shall have to go on being sexually maladjusted.

Mark Twain: a Caricature

MARK TWAIN: A PORTRAIT. By Edgar Lee Masters. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by BERNARD DeVOTO

IT would be hard to overstate the indignant righteousness, the dullness, or the wrongheadedness of this book. Years ago Mr. Masters's warfare against the gods of this world and against American life rose to a memorable heat in one book, but ever since then it has grown increasingly stale and repetitious, and by now it is merely splenetic, merely querulous. Since the press remains free, Mr. Masters indomitable, and publishers reckless with their money, we shall probably get more chapters of it. His book on Lincoln suggests that they may be even sillier than this one, but they cannot easily be duller or worse written. His prose was never very good; in this book it is a horrible blend of Fanny Fern gentility and the rhetoric that Quiller-Couch used to call *babu*.

The gods, America, and many individual Americans have let Mr. Masters down. Abraham Lincoln betrayed him by not agreeing with him about politics, slavery, compromise, finance, the South, the West, and the Middle West, by being far more corrupt and far less honorable, and by knowing a great deal less about the heart of man. Mark Twain also inflicted grievous injuries on him. The *babu* prose is not only vague and verbose but extremely contradictory as well, but the indictment appears to be this: Mark Twain was rich, he was a coward, he was a Republican, he was an infidel and something of an atheist but also a snivelling Christian, and he admired the Jews. Also, he did not write well (nowhere near so well as Mr. Masters), he was not a satirist, and he was not a philosopher. Also, he was a child, a youth, a boy, an adolescent, a humorist, a clown, a jester, a skeptic, a cynic, a Pagliacci—oh, finish it yourself. But mainly he was a coward, he believed in God, and he failed to be a philosopher. And Mr. Masters's remarks about philosophy suggest that he did not intend as satire those crackpot mysticisms on many tombstones beside Spoon River.

Much of the foregoing comes from Van Wyck Brooks's youthful venture in applied idealism, which is the only source Mr. Masters acknowledges. He adds without acknowledgment the villain whom Professor Wagenknecht contributed to Twain demonology, the Reverend Joe Twichell. The rest of it comes from Mr. Masters's chronic anesthesia to literature and from

the Populism of his boyhood. The last element is what gives the book its antique aroma of dead economic heresies, rural rosicrucianism, and malarial bad temper. It is a forty-years-outdated political harangue by a Granger turned Bryanite, with choruses by the village atheist. If you can imagine *The Commoner*, *The Menace*, and Brann's *Iconoclast* combining to bring out a special issue, lumping their crusades together as of 1896, you will have the intellectual flavor, and the intellectual measure, of the book.

It has no bearing on Mark Twain, Mr. Masters is not qualified to write about him, what he says doesn't matter, and I cannot imagine anyone's taking it seriously. But the record must be kept, so—

this is the worst book yet written about Mark Twain, the most inaccurate, the most wildly incomprehensible, and the stupidest. It is so full of errors that I can only name categories, assuring you that dozens, up to hundreds, of examples could be listed for each one. Typical misstatement of history: "the ardent and intrepid Fremont" was not, at the time Mr. Masters alleges, "in the front" of anything in Missouri except some

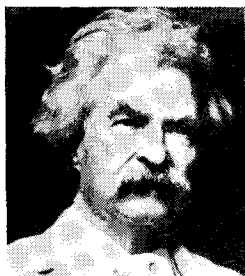
of the greatest corruption connected with the Civil War. Typical inability to set down facts: Adah Isaacs Menken was not, as he says, the wife of Artemus Ward and Artemus was not part of the *Golden Era* group. Typical inability to report what Mark Twain wrote: Hadleyburg is not spelled Hadleyberg and is not an acrostic of Heidelberg, and Tom Sawyer does not join Huck Finn while he is still with the Duke and the Dauphin. Typical ignorance: Charles Dudley Warner was not unacquainted with Missouri but had had a career there very much like his hero's.

It is also typical of Mr. Masters's book that he thinks the Duke and the Dauphin unworthy of anyone's talent, even Mark's, that when he admires something it is always a passage of Mark's lush-est and windiest rhetoric, that he condescends to "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn" (among other reasons because the boys' talk and thinking in Mr. Masters's "Mitch Miller" is much better), that he regards "A Connecticut Yankee" as pure foolery, and that he calls "The Mysterious Stranger" Mark's masterpiece. Such judgments can be attributed to a congenital insensitiveness to literary values, but it is not so easy to dismiss wholly unjustifiable misinterpretations of Mark's motives and

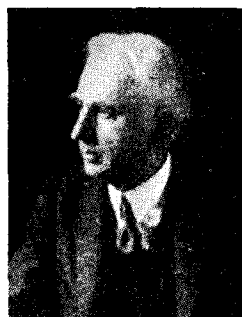
behavior. Mr. Masters tells (adding that he does not guarantee it) a very snide story about Mark's relations with his publishers which is mere rumor, anonymous rumor at that, and which the standards of responsible biography would have required him either to verify or to ignore. He suggests that Mark went West (in 1861) because he foresaw conscription and wanted to avoid it—which is not only screaming idiocy, since no one foresaw it then, but a misrepresentation of every known fact about the episode so outrageous that it must be deliberate. He repeatedly says this sort of thing: "he wrote and published a casuistical apology for the Jews, whether with prudent money intent or not there may be no means of saying." The essay is not an apology, or even an apologia, and it is hard to see how even a militant anti-Semite could find it "casuistical"; but the feeble slur on Mark's motives, so angry and so altogether without foundation, is gratuitous and malicious and of a piece with much else that Mr. Masters writes. He repeats that sort of twisted insinuation over and over, enviously, compulsively, and always, so far as my researches extend, without justification.

A bad book, a false book, sometimes a vicious book, and the silliest of the now numerous books that waste time savagely assailing Mark Twain for not having been what he did not want to be, what he could not possibly have been, what no intelligent person supposes it was desirable for him to be. It has nothing to do with the books that Mark Twain wrote. Plenty of things are wrong with those books, but Mr. Masters is not competent to discuss their weakness, and whatever is wrong with them, they sometimes reach as high as anything in American literature. For fifty years they have given the fullest measure of delight to millions of people, not all of them fools, cowards, clowns, bores, and lickspittles. Whatever Mark was not, he was sometimes a great writer, as great as any we have, as certain of immortality. No part of that is true of Mr. Masters.

People who read such a book as this in good faith should understand that it, like Mr. Brooks's book, is evidently based not on what Mark Twain wrote, but on what Albert Bigelow Paine wrote about him. Mr. Paine was the Boswell of Mark's last years, but the value of his (very valuable) biography decreases with every year he goes back toward Mark's young manhood, youth, and boyhood. Since those are the years that were important for Mark's books, reinterpretations of Paine's interpretation of Mark's elderly memories should be received with skepticism. Isn't it time to grant Paine's interpretation full respect—but to go to the books themselves for our own?



MARK TWAIN



ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE