

with Hollywood gold, too, following the publication of "Light in August." In the spring of 1934, he flew up to New York to take Smith for a little ride—back to Oxford! Flying was in his system and he eventually had to write a novel about it. A year later, he completed "Pylon," the novel about a group of barnstorming flyers in a New Orleans Fair. Some time after its publication, his younger brother crashed the plane and was killed. His death was a pretty hard blow to Bill, and he has since given up flying.

But he has another hobby now: working for the films. He goes to Hollywood a few months out of the year, and he enjoys the technical aspects of production. At first he didn't like working for pictures since his Hollywood experiences weren't different from those of many other established writers. He sat around for days and weeks, collecting his checks. He was annoyed by inactivity. Subsequently, however, he has worked on a number of film assignments, including an adaptation of "Sanctuary," released as "The Case of Temple Drake." His next Hollywood chore may be the adaptation of "The Unvanquished" for M-G-M.

Another interest that is giving Bill a satisfaction he had never known before is his four-year-old boy Joe. The youngster means a great deal to him. His wife Estelle has two children, Sister and Malcolm, both in their teens, by a former marriage, but Joe is his only child.

Bill is a small, thin fellow, weak looking but sturdily built. He has small black eyes that rarely look into those of other people. His hair is black, lightly streaked with grey. He is slow and hesitant in his manner and speech. Asked if he'd like to do this or that, his usual reply is: "Don't care if I do." He is a shy, sensitive, and unsocial person in many respects, but on occasions when he feels free to talk, he has a ready wit and imagination for inventing the most outlandish tales. Most of the time, however, he prefers to retire within himself, for he is definitely not a man of action. In "The Unvanquished" he gives us a personal clue: "Those who can, do, but those who cannot and suffer because they can't, write about it."

This book indicates that Faulkner may be through with horrific tales of brutality and lust, morons and degenerates. Having won a reputation with "As I Lay Dying" and an audience with "Sanctuary," he has now turned to more significant themes and characters of the South. With "The Unvanquished," definitely in that direction, it is good news to hear that Faulkner is working on a complete book about the Snopes family, which has made a slight but favorable appearance in some of his earlier novels.

Anthony Buttitta was editor of Con-temper, published at Chapel Hill, N. C., from 1931 to 1933. He has worked on newspapers and for the United Press. The photograph on page 7 is from "Mississippi: A Guide to the Nutmeg State" (American Guide Series: Viking Press).

A Prospectus for Criticism

THE WORLD'S BODY. By John Crowe Ransom. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

MR. RANSOM'S book of essays is that rather rare phenomenon nowadays, a book on literature intended for those who are really interested in literature, rather than in ideologies or sociologies or psychologies or philologies. To come closer, it is specifically a book on poetry (with some side casts at fiction) and on what the poet has been trying, and is trying, to do in poetry, rather than a monograph on influences and sources. It is not a book for the general reader, nor for the historical scholar, and, for that reason, being expert in its analysis and original in its approach, may contain more for the general reader really interested in poetry than volumes aimed at the unlitrary public.

Mr. Ransom's mind is subtle, good-humored, and truly erudite. He is subtle with the subtlety of the critic who is also a craftsman and who knows by experience the complexity of the poet's job. He is good-humored by comparison with most of his contemporaries, because he is dealing, not with ideologies, or with comparisons, but with an art in which the best have had failures and all but the mediocre taste the fine joy of creation. The lover of the art of literature perforce develops a wonderful tolerance for the fellowship of sincere writers, no matter how diverse, or mistaken, their aims. He is erudite with that genuine erudition which enables him to analyze Milton's experiments in "Lycidas," Shakespeare's failure to be as metaphysical as Donne, or the reason for the obscurity of the "pure" poetry of the moderns, as if each in their crystal spheres of environment were at work in his presence today. This is that application of the historical method to criticism which is so glaringly absent in the work of most university scholars and most unacademic reviewers today.

I find the key to his volume (but only the key, the book is complex in its approaches) in his essay, "Poets Without Laurels," "those whom a small company of adept readers enjoys, perhaps enormously, but the general public detests; those in whose hands poetry as a living art has lost its public support."

The answer is Puritanism—that essence of Puritanism which "craves to perfect the parts of experience separately or in their purity, and is a series of isolated perfections." Puritanism, having invaded religion, and morality, and politics, and science, and business, with resulting specialization in every field, reached literature and in the concentrated field of poetry produced its specializations there.



N. W. Rahming

"Mr. Ransom's mind is subtle, good-humored, and truly erudite."

For fear of getting such a mixture of morality, esthetics, and psychology as one finds in, say, Pope, the modernist tries to separate one element at a time and to give that pure and unadulterated to the reader. Let the reader get pure beauty, or pure thought, or pure sensation. Let the poem be, not tell. But suppose, says Mr. Ransom, this Puritanic effort has gone too far—suppose, in the attempt at purity it has broken down the molecule of, let us say salt, into its sodium or chlorine, neither of which tastes anything like the salt which made the effect of poetry. In other words, perhaps Puritanism in its attempt to specialize has mistaken a true compound for a mere mixture, and by getting its poetry too pure has analyzed it into something which no longer has any true relation to intelligible experience in life. Then you get an intellectual or esthetic exercise which is great fun for the poets, but meaningless to any reader who is not an expert in the rules of the game.

I call this chapter the key to the book because it is an excellent example of Mr. Ransom's analytical method, the purpose of which is to describe what the writer has tried to do, why he has tried to do it, and the results for culture made emotionally articulate. I cannot take the space to follow him through his studies of sentiment, of the cathartic principle, of Platonism, and of the function of meter, though incidentally it may be said that these essays represent the kind of lengthy, thorough, and matured criticism of literary work which is so deplorably lacking just now, having given place and room to historical surveys on one hand, and brief reviews on the other. My criticism of the book, however, can be briefly

put, and by a comparison. The best recent book on literature has been Mary M. Colum's "From These Roots," a study of the heredity of criticism, which is compelling precisely because it is not a series of essays, but a theory and practice of criticism composed as such from the beginning to the end. The dust-cover description of Mr. Ransom's book, "Foundations for Literary Criticism," is inaccurate. It is not so much a foundation as a series of partial constructions upon blocks of theory by no means set together. He should give up essay writing for a while, and organize his interesting and valuable method and thesis into a book. He has the right temperament, and the right training, although his style is unnecessarily nebulous. An adequate criticism of his theories and his qualities as a critic must wait upon a book which he should now be ready to write.

Dear, Dirty Dublin

COMING FROM THE FAIR. By Norah Hoult. New York: Covici-Friede. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

I HAVE not, be it said to my shame, read previous volumes in Miss Hoult's "Holy Ireland" series, but it is difficult to see how any one of her previous books can surpass "Coming from the Fair" as a portrait of dear, dirty Dublin. The philosopher remarks in "The Crock of Gold": "There's a taste on that cake." There's a taste on "Coming from the Fair" which none of the Sassenach can possibly achieve. It is the portrait of a soul, the soul of Dublin in the first quarter of the present century. And yet the effect is achieved by one of the simplest and most direct of fictional methods, the method of reporting conversation. Here is the Dublin of the pubs and streets, cattle-buying and drink, Catholic Dublin, lower middle-class Dublin, Dublin of endless bawdy anecdotes, unconscious poetry and easy quotation from poets, Dublin of political prejudice and religious blasphemy.

The fable of "Coming from the Fair" is so simple it scarcely matters. After the death of Patrick O'Neill, the cattle-buyer, Charles, the eldest son, makes ducks and drakes of his father's money, taking to drink and evil ways. His sister Margaret leaves the church to marry a Protestant Englishman; another sister becomes a nurse; a brother turns to the races; by 1933 only the indomitable mother is left alive. The breaking up of the family is inevitable, but the theme is not treated with that taut seriousness which many American novelists bring to such a topic. On the contrary, what matters in the book



Norah Hoult

is the ebb and flow of warm human life. There are, however, highly dramatic passages. The description of the crossing by a cattle boat of the Irish channel during a storm, a man dying of consumption in the hold and the owners getting drunk above, is one of the most vivid fictional passages I have read this year.

The wealth of observed detail, the wonderful reporting of talk, the sense of living and breathing Dublin life which the book conveys inevitably suggest comparison with the practice of American novelists. "Coming from the Fair" has been a difficult book to write, but the difficulty is not obtruded on the reader. We do not feel the clank of the fictional machinery or watch the novelist gathering his forces for the grand climax of tragedy and woe. Above all, we do not have that sense of tight efficiency, that atmosphere of anxiety to do right by the most Advanced Views in sociology or literature which make so much recent fiction brittle and transient. Miss Hoult's theme is Dublin,

but it is also the savory quality of human nature and human talk. The savory quality of human nature seems to have departed from novelists intent upon saving the world.

It is difficult to say precisely what distinguishes the prose which comes out of Dublin from other prose. Possibly it is a matter of cadence, the cadence of words that are spoken instead of the cadence of words that are to be read. The writing is direct, simple, and to the point, yet the total effect of the volume is a poetical effect. Part of this is due to the lilt of the conversational rhythms, but a large part of it is also due to delight, delight in the vast variety of human life.

The Sky Pilot

POSTSCRIPT TO ADVENTURE. The Autobiography of Ralph Connor. By Charles W. Gordon. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by BOB DAVIS

IN this extraordinary two-dimensional volume, the author deals with himself in the role of a minister of God and with his pseudonym, Ralph Connor, arrayed in the garb of a best-seller, who, without any desire other than to preach the word, suddenly found himself injected into Grub Street, from which his fame echoed far and wide. Indeed, it is difficult to account for the prosperity of the novelist when one stops to consider that he

took time to maintain the high standard of Christianity that marked his ministerial career.

Born of Scotch parents in the early sixties, tempered in the wind and sunshine of the Canadian outdoors, trained in the open and hardened to the pioneer life, the boy Gordon under his father's eye entered the Presbyterian ministry. The youngest and the frailest of five brothers, he was none the less determined to make his own way. With the vehemence of a crusader, he plunged into the mission field of the church in Southern Manitoba, riding the plains, organizing Sunday schools and Bible classes, bucking the four seasons and hearing the war drums of the gathering Riel rebellion. He saw Canada in the raw, came to interpret its vastness, trekking its forests, traversing its rivers by canoe, conquering its prairies.

Summoned out of Winnipeg to Toronto as representative of the Western Home Mission Committee, the Reverend Charles W. Gordon attracted the attention of the Reverend J. A. Macdonald, editor of the church periodical *Westminster Magazine*, and later of the *Toronto Globe*, who invited him to write a story of his own experiences. The result was "Christmas Eve in a Lumber Camp," the beginning of "Black Rock." No author's name was given. Macdonald asked for a pseudonym. Gordon at that time acting as secretary of the British Canadian Northwest Mission, abbreviated into the form "Brit. Can. Nor. West Mission," allowed his eye to fall upon the shortened phrase and replied, taking the words "Can. Nor.," "Sign the article Connor," which the Irish operator changed to Connor. This Celtic surname prefaced by Macdonald with the given name "Ralph," became the pseudonym under which Charles Gordon wrote his celebrated novels "Black Rock," "The Sky Pilot," "The Man from Glen-garry," and others circulated to the number of five million copies and read in all English-speaking countries and in the trenches of the Great War. Prosperity and fame came to the author.

His "Postscript to Adventure" possesses the characteristics of a biography, a novel, and a history of the author's times. Into every phase of life and manners, politics, war, and the pursuit of a Christian ideal, Dr. Gordon strides in kilts, his pipes skirling in the wind, his heart beating with hope, through a panorama vaster than the average man is permitted to live or set down in narrative form.

It is a volume that will entertain the people of America, Canada, and England. Not the least of the fine chapters is the introduction written by J. King Gordon, son of the preacher novelist, who walked through the world, urged on by high ideals and love for his fellow man.