

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

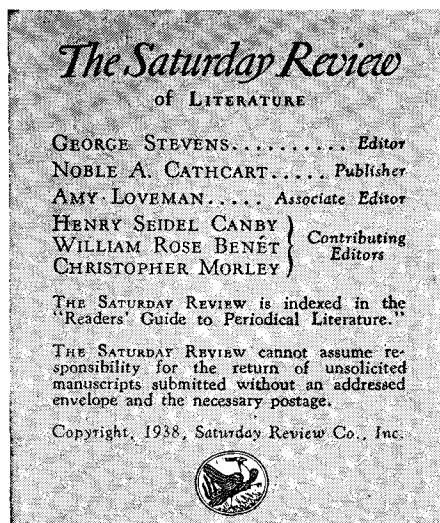
took time to maintain the high standard of Christianity that marked his ministerial career.

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.



The Next Best Seller

THE annual convention of the American Booksellers' Association this week takes place during one of the leanest book seasons in five years. In that space of time the booksellers have waged an uphill campaign for price maintenance, which was won in 1934 with NRA, lost in 1935 when NRA was declared unconstitutional, and won again in 1937 with the Feld-Crawford Act in New York, similar laws in many other states, and the Miller-Tydings Act of the Federal Government.

What the book trade needs now is a good book. A best seller. Something people want to read; something that sweeps the country on its own momentum, regardless of what the reviewers have to say, because readers like it and pass the word along. In 1933, in the trough of the depression, "Anthony Adverse" was the Moses that led the book trade out of the wilderness. "Anthony" not only made its own history, but unquestionably paved the public way for "Gone with the Wind." Do the literati sneer? Do we hear anybody saying that "Anthony" and "Gone with the Wind" are merely our old friends Winston Churchill and Mary Johnston in modern dress? Well, yes, we have heard remarks to that effect, but not many until the popularity of the two books was well established. There are always second-guessers to say that whatever is popular must be mediocre. However, even if we granted for the sake of argument that the second-guessers are right, we still maintain that it is better to read "Anthony" and "Gone with the Wind" than not to read any books at all.

Recently Pearl Buck made a speech, widely quoted in the press, in which she objected to best sellers on various counts, among others that the best seller list is "an iron mold on the public mind." This seems to beg the question, since the public mind is what creates the mold. Objecting to best sellers is like objecting to radio programs; after all, you don't have to read the best sellers if you don't want to. On the other hand, the commercially

sponsored radio programs make it possible for NBC to put Toscanini on a sustaining program; and best sellers make it possible for publishers to issue distinguished books at a risk or at a loss, and for booksellers to carry them in stock.

This year, then, is one when a best seller on the level of Mr. Allen's or Miss Mitchell's would be doubly welcome. It is a lean season for business, and it is a lean season for books. Here is a partial but significant measure of the quality of this year's production: three of the most notable American novelists, including a Nobel Prize winner and a Pulitzer Prize winner, are represented on the spring lists with the weakest novels of their careers. Too many authors are joining crusades; too many book readers are finding the newspapers and magazines a sufficient substitute for the journalism they have been getting in the form of fiction. One of the psychological by-products of a best seller is that it creates conversation, and talk is a good lubricant for reading. What have literary people been talking about so far this year? We can't tell how it has been out your way, but around here the book readers and the book reviewers have been talking about "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," the birth-of-a-baby pictures in *Life*, and Franklin D. Roosevelt (the last, however, not in his capacity as an author). So we look for-

ward to the next big, rousing best seller. We look forward to the reviewers' cry of "masterpiece!"; we look forward to the animated dinner-table conversations about the book, to the parodies and the wisecracks; we even look forward to the second-guessers, who will tell us that the book never was any good, anyway.

None of this, of course, is to say that there are not good and even distinguished books among the new publications, in sufficient quantity and variety to keep any reader busy. It is unnecessary to make a list of them; Thomas Mann's "Joseph in Egypt" is one that would distinguish any season, and it has been very successful. (How we should like to see it sell half a million copies, if only to hear what the highbrows would say.) But the fact remains that after five months of 1938, the best seller lists both in fiction and in non-fiction are headed by books published in 1937. If this meant only that last year's books were enjoying long lives, it would be a good thing. Unfortunately it means also that too many of this year's books are stillborn.

The Saturday Review welcomes the booksellers in convention, and wishes them a successful solution of the problems they have to discuss. But their main problem is outside their field; it's up to the authors.

Radio at Night

BY MILDRED COUSENS

NOW is the time that the dark flows in from the wide Atlantic,
The edge of the shadow glides over the miles of land,
Covering the restless continent far to its western beaches
With the peace of the homecoming hour and the stillness of night.

Then over the hemisphere listening there in the darkness,
The voices, the many voices, hover like birds in the air
That dip to earthward and rising, flutter and disappear.

The threads are tangled, the threads of sound, the golden music,
But over the lighted cities and towns where men are waiting
The words come clear as the clangor of bells.

The magic sound drifts over the Appalachian ridges—
Over the broad lakes held in the cupped hands of the hills,
Over the mighty rivers rushing along their valleys—
Out in the far Dakotas the tired man hitches his rocker
Across the faded carpet close to the dial—

Then lost, lost in the snows of the Rockies the voices,
Like ice-clad planes they are lost—only the strains of music.
Schubert and Strauss and the wraiths of the women dancing
Swirl in the storm on the mountain-peaks of the Rockies—

There on the coasts where all day long the sunlight glistened
The dark lies now, and the voices drift out over
The pale white crescents that gleam like thin young moons—
The songs and the dances, the news of the day and the speeches,
The voice of the suave announcer, the sound of the gong—
Twelve o'clock by Pacific time—back in New York
The music is thinning a little, but way out in Frisco
The fun is beginning, the wine just starting to flow.

The voices float out over the western ocean
And are lost like birds in the deep fog of the dark.