

Kittredge's Shakespeare

AS YOU LIKE IT, JULIUS CAESAR, MACBETH, THE TEMPEST. Edited by George Lyman Kittredge. Boston: Ginn & Co. 1939. 85 cents a volume.

Reviewed by WILLIAM T. HASTINGS

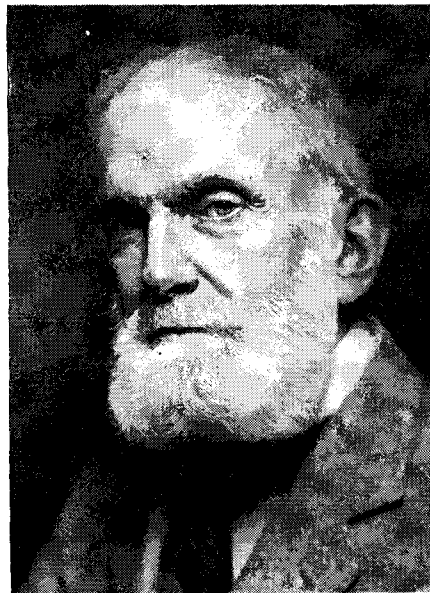
THE promised hour is come at last. Thirty years ago the whisper ran about the Yard that "Kitty" was preparing an edition of the plays of Shakespeare. Fleshed on the daily evisceration of Dowden and Cowden-Clarke in that upper room in Harvard Hall, we hankered for forty volumes of gore. Our hopes were deferred and presently forgotten. Then, by what seemed an equivocation of the Fiend, came Kittredge's Shakespeare in 1936, a one-volume "Complete Works"; with an unanticipated and important new text and with brief factual prefaces to the individual plays, yet without that pungent commentary which for so long made English 2 the most celebrated of Harvard courses. But with the publication of these four attractive volumes the word of promise to our hope begins its fulfilment.

"Understandest thou what thou readest?" is a question too seldom put. Professor Kittredge, for whom elucidation of the text must precede any critical interpretation, has devoted a large part of a long lifetime to the meaning of Shakespeare,—to the great profit of generations of students and indirectly of scholarship at large. It was important that his special gifts of vigorous analysis, shrewd common sense, and immense and extraordinarily available learning should be more permanently recorded and more generally available than in notebooks and on the margins of "Old Rolfe." Knowledge and logic brought to bear upon meaning is Professor Kittredge's special gift. In these four volumes the notes are the thing.

The glosses are brief and simple, with only the necessary minimum of philological data; so admirably easy and idiomatic, in fact, as to conceal from the novice at times the exactness of the definition. One might wish, perhaps, that economy had not always been pressed so far: to the paraphrase of Brutus's "passion of some difference" ("strong and conflicting emotions") it would have been helpful to add a word about "passion" and a parallel to "difference" such as the "different greeting" of Tybalt's patience and choler. It is perhaps only nostalgia that makes one occasionally also regret the infrequency of the old flash of rapier over a disputed interpretation or reading, like "Tarquin's

ravishing sides (slides, strides)." But there is in general copious illustration of the meanings, and a great body of reference to the sources of imagery and ideas; as on witchcraft and magic, on natural history, and on Elizabethan physiology, psychology, and cosmogony.

The introductions, expanded from the prefaces in the "Collected Works," deal succinctly with the technical matters of date, text, source, and the modifications of the sources by the



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dramatist. The introduction to "The Tempest" also brings together the latest discoveries regarding the Virginia expeditions and Shakespeare's probable contact with the promoters. In "Macbeth" it is persuasively argued that the Weird Sisters are not witches but the Norns of Scandinavian mythology and that therefore "the tragedy of 'Macbeth' is inevitably fatalistic," though "to bring them within the range of the spectators' beliefs and experiences" the Sisters are given some of the attributes of witches. In "Julius Caesar" it is argued that the play is truly the tragedy of Caesar. In "As You Like It" there is excellent discourse on the clown and the fool in Elizabethan drama.

As critic Professor Kittredge belongs not to the "romantic" or the "mystical" or the "historical" or the "bibliographical" or the "autobiographical" school but to the commonsensical. He practised a rational historical and bibliographical criticism before these schools were born. It is natural, therefore, that in his introductions and in his commentary he should not deal generally with or

even refer directly to these special revelations, only taking a particular point up here and there (like Dover Wilson's theory of the revision of "As You Like It"). It is clear that he has defined his scope as critic of these plays rather strictly: to expound their meaning in detail and, beyond that, to correct certain misconceptions or to indicate briefly what he judges to be the correct approach to a general interpretation. It could be wished that he had felt free to comment more comprehensively upon them; thus for our benefit, perhaps, to bring his knowledge and acumen to bear upon the controversial interpretations of "Julius Caesar" and "Macbeth." Even in a school text, for example, one might venture to go beyond a suggestive observation ("Since he was writing a tragedy in 'Macbeth' and not a 'history,' he did not hesitate to take liberties"), and, including "Julius Caesar" in the discussion, argue how far the chronicle play principle and the chronicle play pattern persist, affecting technique in the tragedies and restricting the development of a tragic theme.

No doubt Professor Kittredge shares our boredom with "Shakespeare and the mob," "Shakespeare and ideal commonwealths," "Shakespeare and psychoanalysis," "Shakespeare's villains," "romances of reconciliation," "the deadly fourth act," and the other tritenesses of the dusty arena of controversy; but they are not trite to undergraduates, and some of them easily relate themselves to that insistent query, always confronting the scholar: What shall we think of Shakespeare's attitude toward his art (or, if you prefer, his craft)? We could ill spare the stimulating dicta sprinkled through the volumes: "Let us add one category to [Polonius's] varied *genres* and call 'As You Like It' pastoral-comical-actual"—"It is Cassius's nemesis, that, in winning Brutus, he has merely changed masters"—"The dramatic purpose of the quarrel [in Brutus's tent] is to mark the foreordained downfall of the conspirators"—"Banquo [in contrast with Macbeth] takes the incident of the witches rather lightly. . . . The difference is one of temperament." But we should be the richer for his exegesis of such texts in relation to the play as a whole or the general "idea" of Shakespeare.

A generation ago Professor Kittredge seemed to us beardless youths coëval with King Lear or Merlin. He is younger now, and we may cherish the expectation that with his good biting falchion he will yet cut through the fog of critical verbiage which smothers the remaining thirty-odd plays and present them to us with a similar luminous fidelity.

The Great God "Noodeal"

STAR-SPANGLED VIRGIN. By Du Bose Heyward. Farrar & Rinehart. 1939. 230 pp. \$2.00.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THE title of this novel, which is more striking than appropriate, is explained by the fact that it is laid in the Virgin Islands, and begins shortly after Mr. Hoover had transferred them from Danish poverty to American bankruptcy. In it, Mr. Heyward appears to be attempting two things, to apply his sympathetic observation of Charleston Negroes to the far more primitive Negroes of the West Indies, and to show these primitive blacks suddenly brought into contact with civilized, and over-civilized, nations. In the first of these attempts he succeeds—or does so until the second interferes with it: his picture of Rhoda Berg, the big, earthy, genuine negress, of her shiftless, happy man Adam, and her brood of children (by no means all of them Adam's) is a warm and satisfying one. Rhoda one feels as the eternal mother, mothering (somewhat sharply) even Adam, finding him work and seeing that he does it, and bringing forth children with the joyful fertility of the tropical earth.

But halfway through the tone of the novel changes abruptly to farce. The New Deal reaches the islands, and the book becomes a laborious satire on the natives' understanding of the deity "Noodeal," who gives them food which they sell to buy finery, provides them with band concerts and Gilbert and Sullivan, and maintains them in idleness which they enliven by making illicit cocoanut wine. The mockery here is heavy-handed, and its aim is uncertain; Mr. Heyward appears to have intended to ridicule the Government and its lack of understanding of the true problems of its dependencies; but by the time the ridicule reaches the page, it strikes principally at the Negroes and their worship of Noodeal. And all this half of the story comes perilously near a Bourbon attitude astonishing in Mr. Heyward: it does not say, but it could be very easily taken to say, that the Negro was meant to cut cane, and is

happy at that until you-all damyan-kees come and spoil him by giving him ideas of improved conditions.

The end of the book is achieved by another volte-face of the author's: from being the ostensible object of the satire, the New Deal appears as the god from the machine which al-



Du Bose Heyward

lows Adam and Rhoda to take up a homestead. The book might seem better as a whole if it were less good in parts; the scene in which the government provides a parade to propagandize for legal marriage, and Rhoda counters with a parade of her own to popularize natural unions, is extravagantly funny, in a mode like Mr. Evelyn Waugh's of designedly heartless frivolity; but it does not fit with the splendid, savage

Rhoda of the first half, the Rhoda who, until she was spoiled, belonged with Porgy and Bess.

Annals of Science

THE MARCH OF MIND: A Short History of Science. By F. Sherwood Taylor. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. 311 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE RUSSELL HARRISON

IN this scientific era, when the invention of a new kind of glass is allotted a three-page spread in the news-picture magazines, and the future of civilization is considered by some persons to rest on whether scientists of democratic or dictator nations will be first to find the new alloy steel which may give temporary supremacy in the air, books on the history of science are of particular interest. Here is such a book; it was picked up for reviewing, only to be held for absorbed reading by one already familiar with the material under discussion.

Most of the available histories of science have had an academic tinge, which discouraged the layman who might wish for a clear, simple picture of the way men have learned to control Nature to their own ends. Now Mr. Taylor has written a concise, straightforward account of the development of science from the early practical astronomy and surveying of the Egypt-

tians and the abstract and theoretical science of the Greeks, up to the present. The writing is distinguished for smoothness and clarity, and, without the usual devices for attracting the reader, holds interest by its swift pace. While details are not neglected, they are never allowed to obscure the general view of the broad development of science, and the result is a quick-moving, unified, and unpedantic picturization of the development of one aspect of the human mind.

The main emphasis of the book is on the general development of the scientific method, as exemplified in astronomy, chemistry, physics, biology, and medicine. There is a clear, though elementary, discussion of the conflict between scientific and Biblical teachings regarding the structure of nature. The author points out the effect of a stable political organization on the development of science, and shows how culture has depended on the freedom from want and worry which is one of the results of scientific development in a stable political system.

In a book where detail is subordinated to a general view of trends it is ungracious to point out inaccuracies; those few which forced themselves on my attention were uniformly unimportant, and surprisingly few in number for a work covering such a broad range of information. To avoid interrupting the smooth flow of the narrative, or



F. Sherwood Taylor

cluttering up the pages with footnotes, almost no reading references are given, but a few books dealing with the histories of the various sciences are listed together at the end. The volume is well illustrated with fourteen plates and thirty-six text figures, but has an adequate index.

George Russell Harrison, on the staff of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is shortly to publish a volume on "Atoms in Action."