

The Young Sherston

THE OLD CENTURY, AND SEVEN MORE YEARS. By Siegfried Sassoon. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. \$2.75.

Reviewed by RICHARD A. CORDELL

ALTHOUGH Siegfried Sassoon's "Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man," "Memoirs of an Infantry Officer," and "Sherston's Progress" are thinly disguised as fiction, they constitute one of the fine autobiographies of our time. Dropping the anonymity of fiction, Sassoon in "The Old Century, and Seven More Years" tells the true story of his boyhood in Kent and of his years at preparatory schools and Cambridge. It should be said at once that "The Old Century" is a superb book, a poet's book by one of the living masters of English prose. In an age of jitterbug writing Sassoon's rich, lucid prose is the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. The fine promise of "The Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man" (Sassoon's first volume of prose) is richly fulfilled in "The Old Century." Here one discovers the same quiet, unlabored beauty, the same crisp pictures of Kentish meadows and Weald; but the humor is richer and deeper, especially in the sketches of his amazing relatives and Kentish neighbors, and in the shrewd analysis of his own budding creative talent.

As every reader of Sassoon knows, the poet came out of the four shattering years of the war with the Military Cross and a severe shell shock, and a conviction that "war is hell and those who institute it are criminals." His sensitive, humane soul was so harrowed and outraged by the barbarism of war and its chaotic aftermath that the tranquil beauty and the healthy joys of his childhood are by contrast italicized in his memory. When writing "The Old Century," Sassoon ran across a school picture taken in 1901.

Beside me are two nice German boys, first cousins, who afterwards fought one another in a war which neither of them wanted. My own face confronts me with an expression of amused simplicity, suggesting that I wasn't bothering about anything that might be happening when I was fourteen years older than the photograph, taken one Sunday morning in bright winter sunshine, to remind me long afterwards of those precariously remembered humanities which my soliloquies recreate.

Many middle-aged and older people today look back on the twenty years preceding the World War as the most civilized era in man's history. Science had already given us practically all the comforts we enjoy today, if not all our complex and complicating gadgets; moreover, there was a spiritual security which

man may never again possess. Sassoon grew up during these placid years on a garden-like Kentish estate with two congenial brothers as playmates, a healthy love of the outdoors, and endless hours for cricket, fishing, and riding. Naturally "The Old Century" is an idyll, although never sentimental. With rare imagination but with little talent for memorizing facts, he barely escaped an ignominious career in school. His final report from Marlborough School was indeed ominous: "Lacks power of concentration; shows no

particular intelligence or aptitude for any branch of his work; seems unlikely to adopt any special career." But he absorbed life as he lived it, imaginatively and joyously.

"The Old Century" has but one fault: it is too brief. The reader longs to learn more about Siegfried's mysterious Jewish father, about Aunt Rachel and the astounding tribe of Thornycrofts. (The poet's mother we already knew well as Aunt Evelyn and Richardson as Dixon in the earlier books.) But to complain of the brevity of a book is to pay it a tribute.

Richard A. Cordell, of the department of English at Purdue University, is the author of a book on Maugham.

Appeasement at Any Price

IN MY TIME: AN OBSERVER'S RECORD OF WAR AND PEACE. By Sisley Huddleston. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by DAVID H. POPPER

IN style, in important historical content, and in critical evaluation of statesmen and their ideas, Sisley Huddleston's new book takes its place high on the list of our recent crop of journalistic reminiscences. Few men have had the privilege of spending almost a quarter of a century at the chief fountainheads of world news. Few can have been in such close and continuous contact with so many renowned figures. Incapacitated by a cardiac abnormality which kept him from active service in the World War, Huddleston did his bit, without violating his moral scruples, by joining the staff of the *Continental Daily Mail* in Paris and working himself to the bone to get a half million copies of the paper to the British army in France each day. His recollections of Paris at war are vivid and informative.

The work wore him out physically, but by the time the Paris Peace Conference convened he was once more on hand to report the preparation and signature of a peace treaty whose irreparable blunders he was almost alone in pointing out. Then he followed the aftermath, of conference after conference, while Germany was bled white by the victorious Allies and responded with passive resistance to the might of the French army in

the Ruhr. Then Mr. Huddleston went soft. Because he had watched the creation of an admittedly unjust international order, he tended to condone all attempts to alter the existing world status, even by force. No matter that the fascist remedy of territorial expansion at the point of a gun might be worse than the disease, or that territorial expansion might continue beyond all equitable bounds once it was begun. League sanctions, because they embittered international relations and set fascist against anti-fascist, broke

Huddleston's belief in the possibility of a reasonable humanity in our time.

And so, after an increasingly open display of reactionary ideas which cannot be catalogued here, we are given the solution for Europe's problem. It lies in the education of a cosmopolitan elite, without acute national consciousness or racial prejudice, which will be dominated by the idea of love. We must cultivate compassion. We must realize the need for compromise, tolerance, moderation.

Well, Mr. Huddleston's ideas are being put to the test, if in a crude way. The four-power appeasement policy he advocates—with Britain and France, Germany and Italy showering one another with expressions of compassion and pacific intentions—had its inception at Munich on September 29. If Mr. Huddleston is satisfied with the results thus far and still thinks his desire for "love and compassion" will make any impression in Berlin or Rome, I wish he would write another book and tell us about it.



Sisley Huddleston: "His ideas are being put to the test, if in a crude way." . . .

X-Rays on Paintings

ART CRITICISM FROM A LABORATORY. By Alan Burroughs. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1938. \$6.

Reviewed by OLIVER LARKIN

READERS of the *Burlington Magazine* and other art publications already know that for several years the systematic examination of paintings has gone forward by means of the microscope, chemical analysis, and photography by ultra-violet, infra-red, and X-rays. Just how far these "criminal investigators" have progressed, and just what value their discoveries have not only for specialists but also for connoisseurs who are not specialists, are questions now brilliantly answered by Alan Burroughs, himself an expert in the Fogg Museum's Department of Technical Research, and admirably qualified to appraise the efforts of his colleagues here and abroad in the field of the X-ray. Originally planned for experts whose primary concern is with technical method, stylistic identification, attribution, and the detection of alterations and forgeries, this book broadened as it progressed to include among its readers those critics "interested in seeing and not necessarily theorizing their way into art." It did so because the author realized how the minute and subtle discriminations which he and others were able to make, enlarge and deepen our appreciation of art by helping us to re-create the painter's temperament and by sharpening visual and intellectual faculties which are as vital a part of the mature man's equipment for understanding works of art as are the principles of esthetics or the facts of history.

Mr. Burroughs's first four chapters lucidly explain the methods and tools

of the art research laboratory, describe the kind of evidence they provide, warn us against assuming that this evidence constitutes a short cut to knowledge, then proceed to show what the X-ray shadowgraph reveals when it penetrates to the skeleton of a picture, "thus adding to the subject matter of criticism the underpaint and preparatory workmanship in dense pigment," revealing the brushwork which is the artist's handwriting, the "tell-tale tracks of originality" which no copyist can avoid, and those alterations by the original painter's own hand which reveal his mind working,—in short, providing more intimate knowledge of the insides of pictures, on the basis of which historians can hope to settle vexed problems of authorship, and critics be guided toward new critical truths. Readers with patience and curiosity will find reward not only in these preliminary chapters, but also in subsequent passages where the new tool is applied by Mr. Burroughs to problems at first simple and then, towards the end of the book, delicate, complex, and exhausting. Shadowgraphs are produced to support the author's claim that Leonardo painted the central panel in the National Gallery *Virgin of the Rocks*, and that Nicolas Maes was not two painters but "one artist who was three painters in about as many years." "Art Criticism from a Laboratory" establishes the value of X-ray in bringing into focus new facts as "ammunition in the battle of opinions," and breaks new critical ground by revealing the extent to which, as the author contends, "the act of appreciation can be understood without the aid of philosophic or psychological theories," and can be undertaken "within the bounds of common sense and practical reasoning."

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Worcester Art Museum

Left—Nicolas Maes, "Woman at Prayer," detail. Right, shadowgraph detail showing hidden portrait. From "Art Criticism from a Laboratory."

Sound into Sense

THE WONDER OF WORDS: An Introduction to Language for Everyman. By Isaac Goldberg. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. 1938. \$3.75.

Reviewed by J. B. DUDEK

MAN has been using words, Lord knows how many centuries now; but hitherto it has been left for a few specialists or amateurs to take any real interest in words as such, as well as in the faculty that made them possible and in their invention or evolution: the average man uses them in much the same manner that he might board an airplane or click on the electric light. He could not imagine doing without them, but he neither makes any effort, nor even sees the necessity for making an effort, to study or appreciate them.

The subtitle, therefore, of the late Dr. Goldberg's book—"An Introduction to Language for Everyman"—is a little misleading. Nowhere does the author descend to the level of the tabloid or so-called popular mind. His book is a labor of love, and he had the knowledge and ability to make it a masterpiece. Within a volume of reasonable length, he has condensed an amazing mass of philological and allied facts, with no odor of the pedagogy ordinarily pervading erudite works. Each of the twenty-two chapters, e.g., on the origin of speech, the infancy of language, sound becoming sense, imagery and metaphor, the word as magic, the production of sounds, "philologists," Janus words, mutation of meanings, etymology, applied semantics, grammar, style, purism, language with relation to races and cultures, written language, and universal language, whether dealing with facts drawn from experience and observation or with theories deducible therefrom, forms practically a complete essay that may be read leisurely and meditatively, and enjoyed by itself—presupposing always that the reader had a modicum of intelligence to begin with and that his critical faculty has not disappeared through disuse.

The book is advertised as answering questions like: Has man always had a language? Can animals attain speech? and, Will there be a universal language? Of course it does not answer them, since in a sense they are unanswerable; but it does provoke further questioning, and suggests rational speculation, with possible solution of riddles. Last but not least, it does stimulate thought when most people have fallen out of the habit of doing real thinking. Briefly, Doctor Goldberg has succeeded admirably in giving us a scholarly work that is, simultaneously, eminently readable.

The book is beautifully printed, and has an adequate subject index as well as one of the individual words coming up for discussion.