

receded as well as the final harbor ahead. Between the shores of departure and destination there is time, so much time that cloud after cloud passes over the memory of unhappy things, and it is natural and inevitable to face the winds of the ocean with a great and rising hope.

The woman who eats at the next table is a golf champion. She is going to America to play golf. I have read her name in the newspapers and know by expert testimony that she plays very good golf. I don't think she is much aware of what cargo we carry. I doubt if she notices much beyond the first-class passengers (a few of them) and the stewards. Her conversation is breezy and robust, like her appearance. If she visited the refugees in the third class—as I am sure she will not—she would experience sympathy and some obscure discomfort. I can hear her saying through her teeth: "Poor devils!" Halfway up in the elevator she would forget them, intent as she is upon the problem of what she can eat. Between her regime as an athlete, her regime as a somewhat queasy passenger, and the huge, rude demands of her appetite, she is the prey to unceasing conflict, and the whack with which she sends the little white ball great distances is perhaps, after all, no special talent, but the effect of sheer physical exasperation under a trained control.

We have a general and a newspaper owner, too. The general talks gossip, nothing but gossip, although most of it is about the notable monsters of the day, Hitler, Chamberlain, Mussolini, and the like. He has just heard this or that; he read something the other day; and is it true that—? The newspaper owner is fastidious, thoughtful, uneasy; he is the editor of a Liberal newspaper in London, and these are not the most hospitable times for Liberals. So they come to America—perhaps to reassure themselves, perhaps to assert by their presence that there are still Liberals alive on the other side of this sea of transition.

I sit stretched out in a deck chair and read a book: "Les Grands Cimetières sous la Lune." The Great Cemeteries under the Moon. A terrible tale of fascism on the island of Majorca, by a Catholic, a Royalist, an extreme Conservative. He is disgusted and embittered by the sheer indecency of the fascist triumph he records, even though its proclaimed ideas are closely related to those he has adopted as his own. The white wall of the cemetery under the moon, with the dark splotches that lie along its base, the body and blood of Spain. . . .

The passengers go by on the deck, taking their exercise: twice around is a mile. The Czechoslovak diplomat, explaining his own downfall with eager

emphasis, has fallen into the toils of a lady from New York who does not exactly follow all his discourse, but finds it very interesting. She will give a wondrously garbled version of it at dinners for at least a week after she gets home again. Prague and the Ebro have receded, receded; time and the sea have covered them; men and things lie submerged; of their bones are coral made. But in this lull, this swift trajectory over the sunny water, when hope seems altogether to have vanquished memory, there is a gathering-together of forces; and I am not sure whether that sound was the creaking of the boards on the deck of the ship

or the flexing of muscles, thousands of muscles, down below where the workers feed the fire. The ship is forced on over the blue sea, and in five days we do what it took another age three months to accomplish: cross to the New World. Men and machines have so contracted space that this ocean itself no longer divides the hemispheres. It is, rather, a path for the storm that is coming, and those who have fled from the storm once will only have to face it in another place.

If it comes now who will ride it out? The seasick passengers? No: those who tend the engines, watch the sea and sky, feed the fires.

## Valley Forge

*CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY.* By Howard Fast. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1939. 389 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

**B**Y the time it was on the way to Valley Forge, the Fourth New York Regiment of the Continental Army had dwindled from three hundred men to nine. Allen Hale was one of the nine, a youngster who tried to think back to the time when he had had a reason for enlisting, but could not quite manage it. This book is his story and the story of his friends and their women, during the hideous winter of suffering that was to follow—a story of death and disease, of sullen bad-feeling between officers and men, of hopelessness, confusion, and pain—till, at last, von Steuben comes to lick the ragged army into some sort of shape, and, with Spring, there is a chance of going on, for men too weary to care. It is a grim story, and Mr. Fast has concentrated upon the grimmest side of it. He gives us the stinking encampment and the wretched men. Allen Hale and his friends make a hopeless attempt to desert and get back to the Mohawk Valley. They are caught; Bess, the Virginia girl, is shot down by Allan McLane's men; Kenton Brenner, the best man among them, is hanged for high treason, the others whipped. Yet, in the end, at Monmouth, the wretched survivors prove their right to exist, and something beyond their comprehension begins to be made.

Such is the bare outline of Mr. Fast's story, and no one who has looked at the record can quarrel legitimately with his facts. Yet, in his

fierce desire to be realistic at all costs, he has, somehow, created a nightmare rather than a novel. Perhaps part of it is due to the curiously impressionistic quality of his prose, which wanders between the past and present tenses for no discernible good reason and loses itself, now and then, in extremely unrealistic dialogue and description. Part of the time the characters talk like privates in the A.E.F., part of the time like characters in an early Synge play. And, in spite of Mr. Fast's insistence on the mud and the blood, the dirt and the hunger, even these things, in time, come to lack reality. It may be that Mr. Fast wished it so, and wished to give the entire book the quality of a fevered dream. If so, he has succeeded in great measure—but not in convincing us of the reality of that dream to his characters.

Of the few portraits of officers included, Hamilton's is the most successful. Von Steuben's is interesting, if sentimentalized. In drawing Washington, Mr. Fast has tried so hard to get away from the conventional classic statue that he has produced something almost completely unrecognizable. Washington could and did blaze with anger, but he was hardly the hysterical actor that Mr. Fast has pictured. Nevertheless, and in spite of its hectic overwriting, "Conceived in Liberty" has points. It is an honest attempt to tell a great story from the reverse of the conventional point of view. It may give some people an inkling of the facts behind heroic inscriptions. And Mr. Fast will bear watching, as soon as he gets the lightning-bugs out of his style.



Howard Fast

Pinchot



Sylvia Townsend Warner (above), in New York for the recent League of American Writers' Congress, has dinner with Tom Mooney and Dr. Eduard Benes. The author of "Lolly Willowes" is here for the summer. . . . Norman Bel Geddes (left), designer of the General Motors Futurama and author of the forthcoming "Magic Highways," with his models of the car of tomorrow.



Recent visitor from England: Nevil Shute (above), author of "Ordeal." . . . (Above, right) Ben Hecht, of Chicago and Hollywood, was in New York for the publication of his "Book of Miracles." . . . (Below) Adet, Anor, and Meimei, who wrote of their father, Lin Yutang, in their book called "Our Family," have a game of Chinese checkers at the Lins' New York apartment.



Clayton Rawson (above), magician ("The Magic Hat"), does some of his stuff. . . . "Wings of the Morning," came to the Public Library. Mr. Stewart's new



News Pictures by  
Robert Disraeli



## Distorted Mirror of a Brave Old World

*OLD GODS FALLING.* By Malcolm Elwin. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1939. 412 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

**M**R. ELWIN offers in this book a survey of popular English literature between 1887 and 1914. It is his contention that the period was dominated by Humbug, Prudery, and Respectability, that writers who did not compromise with the conventions had little chance of success in an age that worshipped Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, Conan Doyle, Marie Corelli, and Mrs. Humphry Ward. Any person old enough to remember the vogue of these writers will be amazed and amused to find a critic who has, apparently, read and reread this piffle and who can work up a vast amount of indignation about the subject. Since he is protesting against the Victorian conventions, one might expect him to appreciate those who fought against those conventions. Instead of which, he devotes a sixty-page account of George Moore to proving that Moore's love affairs were not authentic and that he was a cowardly poseur who could not write and therefore failed to emancipate the English novel from the thrall of Victorianism. His attack on Moore amounts almost to a personal vendetta and completely misrepresents the man, his work, and his achievement in upsetting precisely those standards against which Mr. Elwin is protesting. The affectations of Moore, the poses of his old age, the fact that he made money out of issuing limited editions, have nothing to do with the case. Moore's novels were so popular that they circulated in cheap sixpenny reprints. Mr. Elwin seems to believe that they were mostly

flops and were remaindered, until he hit upon the device of publishing them in expensive limited editions.

Mr. Elwin gives thirty-three consecutive pages to Arnold Bennett and twenty-seven to Galsworthy, but names like Bernard Shaw and Joseph Conrad receive only passing mention. If Mr. Elwin had confined himself to fiction, his indifference to Conrad would still be astounding, but how a book dealing with Victorian humbug and not restricted to fiction, could give no adequate account of Shaw's dynamic influence on the period in question, I leave to Mr. Elwin to explain. If Sir John Squire is deserving of mention as an editor and critic, then Shaw's role as an emancipator deserves at least a chapter. Mr. Elwin really intended, so far as I can make out, to write about novelists, so he has nothing to say about Synge or Yeats or the repertory theater movement in breaking down Victorian traditions. But he departs from his plan by discussing critics like Gosse and Saintsbury, and giving Richard Le Gallienne his due as one of the most alert reviewers of the nineties. Churton Collins, who disposed of the pretensions of Gosse and Saintsbury, might be entitled, one would suppose, to a word of appreciation, but Mr. Elwin, having mentioned him, quotes an unpleasant epithet about him. He is determined to be the first to debunk the Victorians. Those who really did so at the time when it was necessary get scant praise from Mr. Elwin.

"The literary history, not only of the nineties, but of the whole era between 1887 and 1914, is the story of art's struggle against Humbug." Such is Mr. Elwin's thesis. He does not prove it, because any period can be similarly misrepresented by selecting best-selling authors and log-rolling critics. The obvious fact is that the period in question was one of the most interesting in English literature. It was a quarter of a century or so during which every vital influence in pre-war Europe was flourishing; it was the last gleam of the civilization which died in the four years devoted to making the world safe for gangsters. It cannot be recalled in terms of its obvious trivialities and absurdities. No child in the nineties was under any illusion that Shaw and Ibsen were not so important as Rider Haggard and Hall Caine. The latter made more money—that's all. You could buy Moore and Meredith in cheap reprints for sixpence, and Ibsen's plays were obtainable for a quarter. Mr. Elwin arouses pleasant memories and does justice to men who deserve to be remembered, Henley, Whibley, Le Gallienne, but this book is somehow a distorted mirror of a brave old world.

## Brilliant Surfaces

*YESTERDAY'S DREAMS.* By Ruth Feiner. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1939. 366 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

**T**HE workmanship that has gone into this novel is more than sound; it is expert. Let us consider its plan. Two boys are born to two families of sharply opposed social position, upon the same night. One is Johann Pirelli, son of an actor who plays repertory along the road in Germany. The other is Wilhelm von Rautten, heir to a baronial estate. Their births are linked by time and by the fact that the doctor has been called away from the bedside of Frau Pirelli to attend the Baroness. As they grow up in their separate worlds, one among theatrical folk, the other in exalted society, we are given alternate views of two social milieus; and this, more than anything else, is the measure of Miss Feiner's talents. Using a very sure ear for characteristic dialogue, and a fine visual sense to conjure up character after character with prolific ease, she has presented these two worlds in their most human terms, at their most expressive. The tone is always bright, the pace swift. As the story unfolds we see the two worlds meeting, to overlap at crucial points. Lines shoot between them to join the lives of Pirelli and von Rautten, so that at last the whole structure of the novel tightens, closes in upon a final single drama.

Structure, then, character, color—these are the elements of Miss Feiner's engrossing story. If "Yesterday's Dreams" is engrossing without being important in any larger sense, it is because she has attempted nothing larger. She has easy control of everything necessary to build a large-scale historical novel, but she has thus far contented herself with brilliant and engaging surfaces. Here, for instance, in a story running from about 1880 to present times, she has made no use of history or politics. The war is mentioned, hardly more than that, and the von Rauttens are dispossessed in some mysterious social upheaval, but no sense of the meaning and direction of events emerges. The novel is focussed upon Pirelli and von Rautten as though their fortunes are wholly dependent upon their personalities, and they do in fact develop as though there were no war, no upheaval, no force but their own. It is the hero theory of history applied to fiction, and in such capable hands it produces a novel of romantic force. Miss Feiner may possibly penetrate deeper, to the roots of history, perhaps in her next book, and then we shall have a book of large dimensions.

an and mystery author ("Death from a Top Edward S. Hyams (left), British author of "The New York, found its tempo slow. . . . George R. iants," here from California, visits the New York novel, "Doctor's Oral," is coming in September.

