

The New Books

Art

ALL THE BRAVE. Drawings of the Spanish War. By Luis Quintanilla. With a Preface by Ernest Hemingway. Modern Age Books. 1939. 95 cents.

The drawings are superb, the reproduction adequate. Quintanilla's work, savage, ironic, tender, infinitely delicate, is the pictorial analogue of the war-poems of Villa Moreno and Rafael Alberti. It is impossible to forget this beautiful nightmare of inhuman dead Moors, or more inhuman living Requetés, or dehumanized Nazi prisoners, of ruined buildings, of sprawling men and beasts, of women scurrying to shelter from a flight of bombers. The pictures do not need either Mr. Hemingway's preface (his indignation for once renders him painfully inarticulate) or the commenting text by Mr. Jay Allen and Mr. Elliot Paul. They are their own voice of accusation and warning for us all.

D. F.

Belles-Lettres

THE NOVELS OF JOHN STEINBECK: A First Study. By Harry Thornton Moore. Chicago: Normandie House. 1939. \$1.50.

In the latter part of this rather badly scrambled little volume, Mr. Moore writes sadly (and awkwardly), "A man like Steinbeck presents a difficult combination to find the key to."

Unfortunately his "study" does not go very far toward resolving the combination. A kind of hodgepodge of criticism, biography, bibliography, and geography, the book shows chiefly its author's own muddled state of mind when he approaches his subject. He tries hard enough, to be sure. Once or twice he makes good points; notably when he suggests Steinbeck's greatest weakness, which is his tendency to push melodrama too close to the edge of out-and-out burlesque, and when he stresses the mystical quality of Steinbeck's writing. But for the rest, Mr. Moore's dogged pursuit of clues defeats his purpose. What he seems to have missed completely is Steinbeck's childlike sense of fun. Missing this, he has failed to find the most important letter in the combination for which he is searching.

This is not to condemn Mr. Moore wholesale. A good deal that he writes is valid; some of it is worth putting into print. When he approaches the early "Cup of Gold" from the angle of isolating examples of rondure and concavity as evidence of the author's feeling for hill-and-valley contours, interpreted in the Freudian sense, he is merely being silly; but when he points out that in "Of Mice and Men" there is no authentic tragedy deriving from character he is writing sound criticism. And there are several places where he comes close to putting a finger on at least a few of the keys to

the Steinbeck character as that is demonstrated in his work and out of it.

Nevertheless, the total impression is that the book does not justify itself. Sharply pruned, Mr. Moore's critical examination might have made a sensible and useful article for one of a very few literary magazines. Corrected a trifle, though the errors of fact are minor ones only, his biographical sketch of Steinbeck might have become a piece for a different type of periodical. The bibliography, also susceptible of correction, has been done before, as the author acknowledges in his preface. As for the map of the "Steinbeck Country," the only answer to that one is "So what?" Solemnly assembled and put between covers, the various bits still do not add up to a book. For the matter of that, at this point in Steinbeck's career, why should they?

J. H. J.

Fiction

THE DARK WING. By Arthur Stringer. Bobbs-Merrill. 1939. \$2.

Arthur Stringer started writing novels in the 1890s when it looked as though Robert Louis Stevenson's revolt against the new realism and the newer naturalism might succeed in leading fiction back again to color and romance; but although public acclaim and pecuniary reward were bestowed upon F. Marion Crawford, Charles Major, George Barr McCutcheon, and Gene Stratton-Porter, no first-rate American novelist engaged in the romantic revival: Crane, Norris, Howells, James, and Dreiser stood stubbornly by their guns. Arthur Stringer's new romance, "The Dark Wing," is indistinguishable in flavor and trimmings from his novels of more than

forty years ago. From a literary point of view "The Dark Wing" is an anachronism in the day of Steinbeck, Faulkner, and Hemingway, yet it is the kind of novel that dominates the rental library shelves.

Deserting his favorite backgrounds—the Canadian woods and prairies, Calgary, Labrador, Alaska, etc.—the novelist places the setting of "The Dark Wing" in New Jersey. The story begins with the familiar "Candida" triangle: fluffy-haired young poet, a lovely, "misunderstood" matron of thirty-seven, and her stodgy, bovine millionaire husband. Shaw, of course, would have scorned marrying his Candida to a coarse Philistine; such a match would have discredited her intelligence, and to set up a man of such sodden straw as an opponent of the fiery bard would be anything but

NEILSON OF SMITH

by Hubert Herring

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sporting. The real battle, however, is not between husband and poet, but between mother and daughter, who conduct a preposterous struggle for the favors of the tiresome boulder, while the husband bumbles and fumes in the background.

"The Dark Wing" is a two-dimensional novel of adventure and near-romance with incredible characters speaking a language never heard on land or sea, but it shares one hearty virtue with all Arthur Stringer's many novels: things do happen. The story advances sturdily from chapter to chapter and will entertain those readers who are indifferent to its dubious psychology and who do not fret at the trite phrase.

R. A. C.

THE SEVENTH PLANK. By William McDowell. Putnams. 1939. \$2.50.

Brian Forbes is the seventh son of a seventh son, born in the seafaring and shipbuilding town of Garrow (England) to an impractical father who spends more time on useless inventions than on his business of ship-chandling. Young Brian is a swan in a duck's nest, wants to be an artist and reads Fitzgerald's Omar, gets marooned in a shipyard drafting room, and becomes an inventor—a real one. While still a boy, pulling the last block from under a ship about to be launched, he looks up, catches the eye of a baronet's beautiful daughter on the launching stand, and conceives the great love of his life. So does she, and both remain true to the remembered dream through 326 pages of assorted incident gently peppered with the supernatural. The incidents are often well-conceived and the

connections among them deft, but they sum up to a hammock-piece in the tradition of the Edwardian popular novel.

F. P.

Miscellaneous

YESTERDAY. By Miriam Shomer Zunser. Stackpole. 1939. \$2.50.

Mrs. Zunser has stipulated from the first that this is no novel she is attempting, but an honest narrative record of her family's history — three generations of it in the familiar span from Russia to New York — before she forgets. The stipulation is an honorable one, and is accepted; what we have, then, is a long and reverent chronicle made of all those anecdotes she has heard on countless evenings over the tea-glasses, from mother, father, grandmother, uncle. It adds up to a story we have been given many times before, but one still worth hearing nevertheless. There is a special kind of atmosphere that the Jews carry with them as they flee from one place to another: the only thing they can carry. It is composed of bitter remembrance, emotionalism, and stubborn endurance, leavened with an unreasonable hope. It rises out of the tales they tell to each other, and gives its special quality to such books as this one. Yet it is a chronicle and not a novel; a subjective and self-conscious characterization, not a whole, true portrait. That is why the best Jew in literature is still one that was created by an Irishman named Joyce.

N. L. R.

OUR SMALL NATIVE ANIMALS: Their Habits and Care. By Robert Snedigar. Random House. 1939. \$2.50.

To this reviewer's misguided neighbor, who recently spent four days trying to feed a starving hawk on grass, he is going to recommend Mr. Snedigar's new primer on the proper entertainment of our wild-life in captivity. For such as he, as well as for the little boys who keep turtles in glass jars and the more mature collectors who build up small zoos, this volume digests, in readable and entertaining fashion, all the pertinent information as it has become known through years of careful experiment. Anyone who lives in the country sooner or later finds himself in possession, willingly or unwillingly, of an orphaned baby chipmunk or some other equally helpless animal. Usually the benevolence he exerts in its behalf, accompanied by total ignorance, as in the case of the hawk, results only in unnecessary cruelty and failure. To succeed, his benevolence must be coupled with enlightenment—and here it is, three hundred pages of it, with photographs and line-drawings.

Mr. Snedigar does not cover all the native species suitable to captivity, but he does cover the main groups, fish excepted. The value of such a book, compact and well organized as this one is, needs no further comment.

L. J. H., Jr.

Letters to the Editor

(Continued from page 9)

impart its author's feelings fully to those who have not "heard the burden of Collects, Prayers and Novenas 10,950 times" is tantamount to affirming the provinciality of Joyce's mind and attributing a narrowness more serious to it than any I still am prepared to attribute. I have given Joyce the benefit of a doubt. I faced the possibility that in time he might grow generally comprehensible. This doubt still seems perfectly justifiable to me. Mr. Ford, however, denies the possibility.

Another of these involuntary minimizations flows from his readiness to call Joyce's "chief note" "a kind of tender picking on God and his Mother such as the pupils of Jesuits will get a tittering joy at bringing out while chancing that their innocuous blasphemies shall bring down upon their heads the stern voice of their teachers," etc. When I spoke of Joyce's "half tender and half savagely blasphemous picture of human life", I for my part did not attribute to his impulse the kind of childish defiance which while amusing in school-boys would be lamentable in a man of Joyce's stature, experience, and capacity. His conception of the human dream as that of a poor muddled little drunkard's seemed to me the equivalent of the cry of human helplessness and rage. When I read the sentence "In the name of Annah the Allmaziful, the Everliving, the Bringer of Plurabilities, haloed be her eve, her singtime sung, her rill be run, unhemmed as it is uneven!", I considered this parody of the Koran and the New Testament neither especially comical, ingenious, nor tasteful, but merely the device of a rather resourceless writer aiming to represent his dreamer's resistance to his better half—mother, wife, and sweetheart. But Mr. Ford identifies this kind of thing as an instance of "Joyce's chief note", and even finds it joy-giving. Personally, I still feel that I am right and he is wrong. Thus, my dismay at finding the wholly admirable author of "Some Do Not" gratuitously playing the role of Ham in reference to what I still take to be the illusory nakedness of his Noah.

There are further objections I would like to raise. But these are my main ones; and I believe that on due consideration Mr. Clear-The-Way will concede their validity.

PAUL ROSENFELD.

New York City.

Raunt

SIR:—Re P. E. G. Quercus's query about the word "raunt," may I give you a hint for what it may be worth? You say it is supposed to mean in Scotch: "young female fish." There are many similarities between Danish and Scotch and in Danish the word "rogn" means fish roe and it is pronounced very much like "raun."

HOLGER A. KOPPEL.

Danish Consulate,
Baltimore, Md.

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Trade Winds

BY P. E. G. QUERCUS

An Insurance Policy

ON the first of May, 1847, a young man in Brooklyn, whose age was approaching 28, applied for a life insurance policy in the sum of \$2,500. He stated that he had not had small pox nor gout, nor insanity, rupture, fits, asthma, nor spitting of blood. His friend William Burns, who had known him 6 years, testified that the applicant's habits were "temperate—exceedingly so." Dr. Robert Rosman, the medical examiner, went over the applicant on May 15, 1847. He reported: "About six feet, full, healthy, sedantary [sic] as an editor. Heart action slow and regular, pulse rather slow but regular, full and soft. Healthy, risk good." The Insurance Company, through Stephen Crowell, agent in Brooklyn, issued the policy, at an annual premium of \$56. There was also a fee of \$1 for the drawing of the policy. This was accurate figuring on both sides, for the insured lived nearly 45 years after the policy was issued. If he duly met all his 44 annual premiums (which somehow we doubt?) he must have paid in a total of \$2,465. If he had lived about five weeks longer he should have paid in more than the sum of the policy. This canniness was rather characteristic of the old boy, whose name in the policy was Walter Whitman Junior. We know him better as Walt. The documents have been lately on display in the home office of a big insurance company.

The *Colophon*, the quarterly laurel-wreath on the brow of the book-collecting hobby, so much enjoyed the college student essays sent in last year that it again invites college undergraduates in the U. S. and Canada to describe their own adventures in book collection. Students graduating this spring are allowed to enter. MSS must reach *The Colophon*, 229 West 43rd Street, N. Y. C., not later than August 31. "Any bibliolatrous angle is acceptable except purely literary criticism. The article must be about one's own collection." The prize is \$50—and the fun of seeing it published in one of the most assiduously printed magazines in the world. *The Colophon* is to the book collector what *Fortune* is to the vice-president of a bank.

Our favorite printer's error this week is in the Interborough Rapid Transit Company's excellent little booklet on *Seeing the Sights of N. Y. City* (by Subway and L). There, under a photograph of Chinatown, we read that Mott Street is famous for "Confusionist Shrines." We were greatly pleased when we got a letter from a young writer in Reykjavik, Iceland. Somewhere he had seen an allusion to this magazine, and wrote, "What is *The Saturday Review of Literature*? I have a hunch that it is the magazine I have been thinking about subscrib-

ing to. Since the *Bookman* died I have never laid my eyes on an American literary magazine. Therefore I am most blissfully ignorant of what is going on in the American literature."

So far as we know, the first book ever televised was W. S. Hall's *Eyes on America* (Studio Publications). The British Broadcasting Company on May 8 gave television transmission to 8 of the American paintings in Mr. Hall's book. Those chosen as of special interest to British watchers were "Arbor Day" and "Young Corn" by Grant Wood; "Department Store" by Kenneth Hayes Miller; "Touchdown Play" by Benton Spruance; "Erosion" and "Drouth" by Alexander Hogue; "November Hurricane" by J. W. Golinkin; and "Texas Lake" by Everett Spruce. Arthur Pforzheimer, 26 East 56, is showing a number of unusual MSS and first editions by Eugene Field and George Bernard Shaw, including two musical compositions by Shaw. We knew that Shaw was for some years a music critic but had not encountered him as composer. Somehow we think these pieces (settings for lyrics by Dollie Radford) are probably lacking in melody. Balsam Pilloes, our staff poet, says every time he sees those car-cards about some Golden Hair Wash he wants to write a novel called *Bottled in Blonde*. Balsam submitted 15 poems (under 15 pseudonyms) to the World's Fair competition, but none was enough like Walt Whitman to be taken seriously by the judges.

Writing recently about Moxon, publisher of so many famous poets, we'd have added (if we'd known it) that he issued the first English edition of *Two Years Before the Mast* (London, 1841). We discovered this by seeing a copy, and surprisingly cheap too, at the Gotham Book Mart. Any advertising card that contains two grammatical howlers goes into our private collection. For instance, on the L. I. R. R., *Dame Nature Cream Lotion* "to really remove chap," etc., and "It's ingredients," etc.

There is an appeal in England to raise £2,500 to buy for the British Museum a collection of letters written by John Donne in regard to his clandestine marriage in 1601. These, according to the *Lit. Supp.* of the *London Times*, have remained all these years in the hands of the family to whom they were written.

The readers of *The Saturday Review of Literature* will find that this issue, nearly two months from its fifteenth birthday, wears a new dress. The publishers have obeyed that famous magazine bon mot, "You can have your cover any color you want so long as it is red." The design was executed by William Dennis. The type selected for the cover by our printer, John Glassman, is Egmont bold.

3 O'CLOCK

by Thomas Wolfe

The editors of the *North American Review* are proud to announce that in their Summer issue—just off the press—they are privileged to publish, in advance of its appearance in book form, an important chapter from Thomas Wolfe's posthumous work, *The Web and the Rock*.

The same issue of the *North American Review* poses and answers a number of questions which are of outstanding interest to intelligent Americans:

Why and to what extent is the United States rearming?

(Answered by David Popper, Foreign Policy Association research expert)

Why aren't there more women in politics?

(Answered by Grace Adams, well-known psychologist)

Why does the United States baffle foreign diplomats?

(Answered by Duncan Aikman and Blair Bolles, Washington journalists)

Is America becoming a world center of art?

(Answered by Christopher Lazare, famous literary and art critic)

The new Summer issue of the *North American Review* contains, in addition, many other important features—penetrating articles, fine short stories by newly discovered authors, departments on books, drama and art.

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