

Letters to the Editor: *Unreadable Poetry;* *Carolina Governors*

Modern Poetry and All That

SIR:—It gave me much pleasure to read William R. Benét's critical remarks on modern poetry in your March 4th issue. A reader of the best poetry in several languages over a period of years, I heartily agree with everything he said in his admirable article, which I have pasted into my copy of Housman's "The Name and Nature of Poetry."

I hope Mr. Benét's article will be widely read and digested by every poet and editor throughout the country. After all, the editors are largely responsible for what has been imposed on the public in the way of verse. Much of modern poetry, so called, is unreadable, much of it is confused and lacking in rhythm. Robert Frost spoke for a multitude of readers when he said in one of his lectures, "I don't want to be bothered by a poem, I want to be thrilled."

M. K. GRAY.

Hartford, Conn.

"Why Was Lincoln Murdered?"

SIR:—In your issue of February 4th Allan Nevins states that in 1937 and 1938 only one first class, blue-ribbon historical book was produced in this country.

I wish to take exception to this statement. In my opinion Otto Eisenschiml's "Why Was Lincoln Murdered?" meets this specification. Besides blowing the lid off a mystery of history and bringing out more new facts and new approaches than can ordinarily be found in any volume, it has caused an avalanche of literature on the assassination to follow in its wake, all of which more or less leans on the material produced by Eisenschiml's research efforts.

Professor Paul Buck, reviewing the book in your issue of March 27, 1937 said that Eisenschiml's book, "might well result in a wholly new re-examination of the later Civil War and early Reconstruction Period. Eisenschiml takes his place deservedly along with Herndon, Nicolay and Hay, Beveridge and Barton, as an indispensable item in Lincolniana."

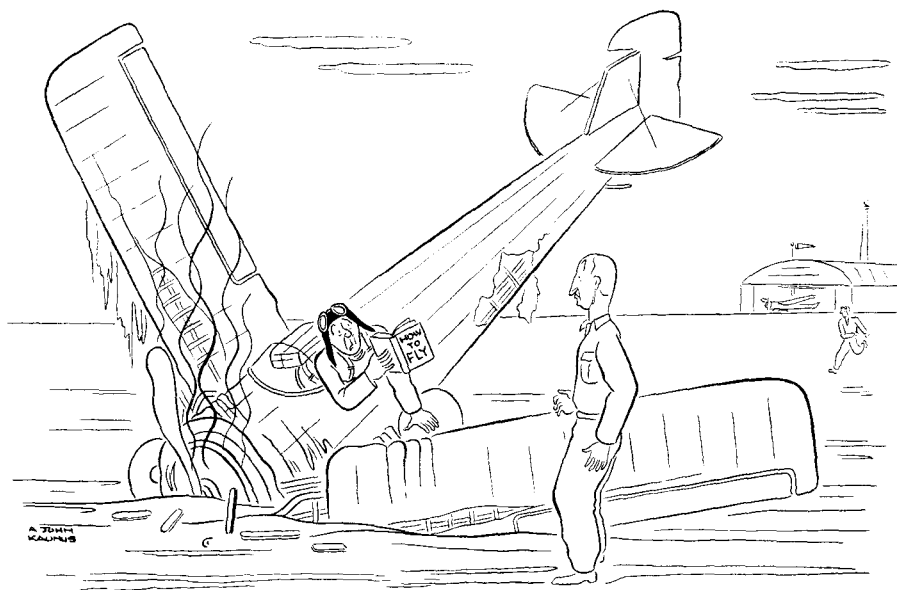
In the light of this how can Allan Nevins brush this work aside as unimportant? History could stand some more books that are neither biography nor rehash of well-known facts.

JOHN W. CURRAN.

De Paul University,
Chicago, Ill.

Long Time Between Drinks

SIR:—P. E. G. Quercus ought to get our governors straight. Zeb Vance was our Civil War governor, following Governor Swain who became president of the University of North Carolina—the old saying being, "'Old Bunc' was governor of the state and then they sent him to Chapel Hill to educate him." And the famous remark about the long time between drinks was made to Governor Edward B. Dudley, who was governor from 1839 to 1841. This happened at the old Henry Jones place about nine and a half miles west of Raleigh, and the side-



"Why don't these books have an index?"

board on which the bottles stood is still in the Jones family. Mason Pierce Butler was the Governor of South Carolina, and they say one reason the saying became so well known was that the remark was "It's a damn long time between drinks," and the butler was shocked and repeated it to his mistress who was a good Methodist lady and properly shocked also. And then back the butler hurried with the drinks.

LUCY M. COBB.

Raleigh, N. C.

Meringue and Manure

SIR:—I am neither publisher, editor, critic, nor writer. I am a rank outsider. But I am not quite so rank as the reform school of criticism of which Mr. Wallace Stegner [reviewer of "Wind without Rain," *SRL*, February 11] is one graduate. There are others and I hope he will excuse me for lighting the fuse with his match.

I have earned by living in eight countries, in cities large and small, in towns, camps, and in the open country. I have fought frostbite in Wisconsin and perspiration in Rio. I have both tightened my belt and let it out. I have learned one thing.

The man who damns the other fellow's point of view has a point of view himself that isn't worth a damn. It is easy to call names and make faces but when you do it means just one thing to the man who has been around enough to really know how people act. It means there isn't a shot in your locker.

Another thing. Truth is wherever you find it. Manure is no more true than meringue. It has a more noticeable stink so more people get hep to it. Obvious seems to be the literary word for it. Manure is more obvious than meringue. It takes no more skill to spread it. I'll say that, and I have spread both. I have a high opinion of both, too.

As for hasheesh, don't you fool yourself. It will "ratify" your "comfortable superstitions" about manure just as quick as it will those about meringue. It looks as if the manure superstitions of such critics have got them hog-tied so tight they don't need hasheesh. They won't deal in anything but manure. They will even pass up lemon pie. What I want is more of both and better.

Thank you.

MARSHALL CALHOUN.

Madison, Wis.

Holidays and Festivals

SIR:—I am collecting new material for a three- or four-volume anthology on all of the American holidays and festivals. Contributions of poems, articles, essays, epigrams, stories, plays, tableaux, games, exercises, etc., are solicited, and will be carefully considered. Return postage should be enclosed, with authorized permission for reproduction, or address of copyright holder. These volumes will complete and bring down to date my series "Our American Holidays" (18 vols. Dodd, Mead & Co.).

ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER.

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New York City.

André Malraux

SIR:—I am preparing a study on André Malraux and should appreciate receiving from your readers any information they may possess on this writer. Of course I am especially interested in unpublished letters or documents of biographical or literary interest, but even a reference to a published item that may have escaped my attention would be welcome and receive proper credit.

ANTHONY L. ELICONA.

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Columbia University,
New York City.

Two Women and a Doctor

DR. ADDAMS. By Irving Fineman. New York: Random House. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MABEL S. ULRICH, M.D.

NO one who reads this novel will doubt the publishers' statement that four years were devoted to its writing. In it the author has introduced practically every problem that has contributed to the general confusion of the past decade.

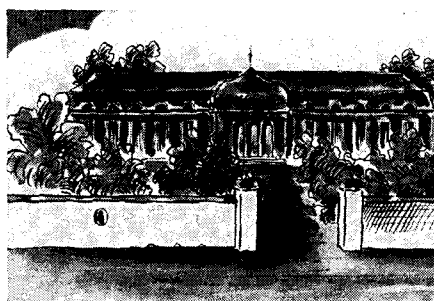
Dr. Addams is no mere doctor. He is an "eminent biophysicist," a researcher, and lecturer in a famous Foundation. But although he is Nobel Prize material, science has endowed him with none of that objectivity with which it supposedly rewards its disciples. As an intellectual he is of course painfully aware of all the besetting social problems, but his primary concern, first and last, is Woman. In the laboratory he concentrates upon the electromotive force of her uterine cells—in so far as his pretty technician and his subconscious will let him. (The subconscious appears throughout the book in italics, which helps quite a lot.) Away from his test tubes the research becomes more personal but no less exacting.

We first meet the eminent scientist in bed beside his weeping wife. It is his birthday, and he is forty-five. For 454 pages thereafter we follow his musings and his arguments with his confrères, in long paragraphs devoted to the physics and chemistry of cells, to Semitism and refugees, to religion and philosophy, to social medicine and the horrid behavior of self-seeking researchers and practitioners; but seldom do we get more than a page removed from the eternally vexing dependence of the male, however evolved, on the body and the spirit of woman.

Dr. Addams's marriage to Louise gave every promise of success. She was intelligent and good looking, and she belonged to the rich Boyer family who made the Foundation possible. But it just didn't go. There were psychological blocks and the pair agree to separate. Then into the laboratory comes the sexually emancipated Irene, a modern hetaera, who shares lavishly her gifts of body and mind with all the men who need her, content to bring them physical happiness and to assist them—with no annoying questions—in their intellectual pursuits. Irene, in short, is the dream-woman who has haunted the adolescent intelligentsia since the days of Sappho. But after a pretty gay whirl, Irene true to her American womanliness, wants to be a wife and mother and chooses a young, rebellious Swede for her marital adventure. The effect of all this is to drive the biophysicist back to his notes on "electro-osmosis for inorganic systems." But now his subconscious is urging him to call Louise, so our in-

ference is that everything turns out happily. The hydrodynamic equation with which the book ends, I have no doubt, is loaded with symbolism, but I'd have to take it to a physicist to be sure.

It is obvious that Mr. Irving Fineman has put an enormous amount of thought and effort to the writing of this novel. But he has tried too hard and used far too many words. Regretfully this reviewer confesses to have found "Dr. Addams" labored, pretentious, and not a little absurd.



From the jacket of "Beware of Pity"

Code of a Gentleman

BEWARE OF PITY. By Stefan Zweig. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

STEFAN ZWEIG'S first novel reveals an expert story teller, a man with as thorough a grasp of the novelist's technique as of the biographer's. This novel of pre-war army life in Austria, of a young officer who took pity on a crippled girl, and out of the weakness of pity involved himself in obligations he could not fulfill, is good reading. Mr. Zweig moves from scene to scene, building up a picture of the army and aristocracy, rigidly hemmed in by convention, that is as interesting as the central dramatic situation. There is a long interlude in the middle, in which the rise of the crippled girl's father from poverty to riches makes an excellent novelette in itself.

"Beware of Pity" is primarily a good story; its material is not substantial enough to make it an "important" novel. The psychology is acutely observed, but the people live on such a small scale of experience that there is not a great deal of psychology to observe. The point that pity is dangerous is incontrovertibly established, but it is not a very far-reaching point. What Zweig actually had to say about life and human nature could have been said in one-third the space, and it would have been more incisive and more memorable. That, however, does not affect the superb readability of this novel, in which the length never gives the effect of padding. In the translation of Phyllis and Trevor Blewitt, the book seems to have been written in English—they manipulate the language with subtlety, sensitivity, and resource.

A Developing Talent

SOME LIKE THEM SHORT. By William March. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

IT is likely that most readers will be unprepared for the store of distinction and brilliance contained in this volume of short stories. After the flurry caused by "Company K," March's work has enjoyed only a quiet celebrity among those who know it. All the more reason, then, why this book should receive the attention it deserves. It is the work of a talented writer who knows his craft and is steadily expanding his powers. Some of these stories, like "A Haircut in Toulouse," "A Memorial to the Slain," and "Geraldette," are clean-cut (that is the exact word, the effect being as of a sharp, careful etching with a precise instrument) exercises in the modern technique of restraint. It is clear that March has learned something from Hemingway, as who has not? But he is far from being a derivative writer. He has something to teach as well, a highly personal quality of emotion, and affirmation. Such a story as "The Listening Post," a centering of the physical and spiritual catastrophe of war upon one lone spot on a shattered field, is told in terms at once passionate and mystical, terms Hemingway has never permitted himself but which only he can successfully dispense with. March has no fear of an expressed emotion. He knows, as in "Nine Prisoners," how to keep it free of sentimentality, while rich in suggestion.

The word "experiment" is written large across these pages; there are few tricks and visions in the short story that are not attempted here. There are two stories each exactly a page and a half long, a length that offers terrific difficulties. The agony column of the London Times has been used before, but perhaps never as ironically and tellingly as in the six-page story, "A Short History of England," made up entirely of the column. There are trials at harsh realism and one at a modern straight-faced fable, that do not quite come off. But there is also "The Shoe Drummer," frankly in the later Joycean manner of "Work in Progress," which is remarkably interesting whether it comes off or not, simply a great try. Every one of the stories is alive with active artistic intelligence. They suggest in sum that March's next novel will be something to look out for.

Erratum

The Horace Bibliography, "Quintus Horatius Flaccus," reviewed in our issue of March 4, was credited to the California University Press. We are advised that the University of California printed the book for Mills College; the latter institution is the publisher.