

# Old Salt of the Tortoise Tavern

*DOCTOR DOGBODY'S LEG.* By James Norman Hall. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1940. 371 pp. \$2.50.

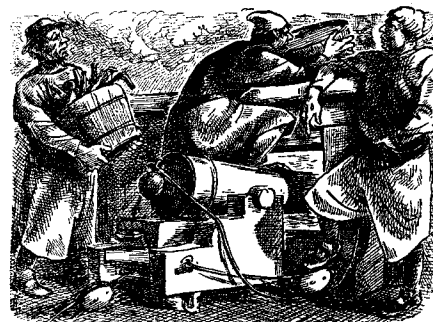
Reviewed by CHARLTON OGBURN, JR.

**I**N a respite from the strenuous work of collaboration, one of our favorite tellers of tales presents us with a collection of delectable yarns. Readers with a relish for pleasantly incredible adventure handled with all the zest, dexterity, and sportsmanship of a master fisherman playing a trout, should find in them an irresistible escape from the gloom of the present and of the past century during which it has been gathering. Doctor Dogbody was a lively relic of another and less straitened age and a repository of its witty and irrepressible spirit.

As a surgeon in the Royal Navy, retired at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, he had a full life to draw upon in regaling his cronies of the Tortoise Tavern in Plymouth with his experiences—a very full life. He had been present at the victory of Copenhagen and seen it effected partly through the agency of a waxen effigy substituted for a drunken officer lying below decks. Having saved the life of Catherine of Russia by a command operation, he was very nearly devoured by wolves under the Imperial eyes Themselves—a fate which he regarded as only slightly more trying than that which he had been led to anticipate by her affectionate attentions. As an unlikely consequence of missing his ship at Capetown while off exploring the interior, mounted on an ostrich, he was happily instrumental in bringing a Spanish prize to England and establishing the fortunes of a penniless lieutenant with eleven unmarried

daughters. Not only was he a friend of Linnaeus's and of Benjamin Franklin's; he could claim credit for bringing to England its first cargo of West Indian oranges—a result of being blown off his course while cruising idly in a slaver of which he had taken command in order to recompense its captives for their wretched lot with an idyllic interlude among the Caribbean isles. In these and the many other exploits Dogbody recalls, his own part was a modest one as he portrays it, though in every case it resulted in the loss of his leg.

Deriving from the doctor's own individuality and that of the memorable subsidiary characters, the warmth and spontaneity of these reminiscences, consistently droll as they are, however bloody the action, however acute the danger that threatens, are highly infectious. No small part of their charm is accounted for by their language. Racy and salty with the flavor of the eighteenth century and of the



*From the book.*

**Kitchen police conference.**

sea, replete with the most colorful expletives, its polish yet remains uncompromised. In "Doctor Dogbody's Leg," James Norman Hall demonstrates that he can work within a circumscribed compass and never muddy the surrounding waters by a single false step, that without sounding one portentous note he can produce an eminently satisfying book. And that surely, is a test of a writer's skill.

## New York Women

*THROUGH THE HOUSE DOOR.* By Helen Hull. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1940. 264 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

**I**N this story of three generations of women in New York, two of them caught in marital situations not easily borne and the third looking from youth to the attainment of a maturity which will be no longer troubled by changing ideals and values, Helen Hull has written an honest and competent novel of modern New Yorkers. But it would be a better book if its craftsmanship were not quite so perfect and the pitifulness and the passions of its people seemed more a part of life and less a part of a design.

Miss Hull has undertaken—and with wisdom—a study of women who work and of men who live upon their working. Agatha, the eldest of the three generations and a grandmother who does not seem one, took her Humbert in the midst of her success and maturity as a writer, and his middle-aged philandering with her car and her money is a humiliation almost past bearing. But Beatrice, her daughter, only went to her swift success as radio adviser to women after her brilliant and sensitive Julian was driven within himself by the half blindness which broke his career as research scientist. Their daughter, young Leslie, faces

their division in partisanship for her father.

It is part of the design that Agatha and her Humbert came to satisfactory relationship despite her feeling that a fed lover should be a grateful and faithful one and his aging vanity which found such a love a prison. There is a comic quality about the troubles of Agatha and Humbert even when she lies, possibly dying, in the hospital. Miss Hull's first concern is for Beatrice and Julian, the darkness which divides them, and their way back to a shared light. At the last Beatrice does not fool even herself in the pretense that her lively new life with a lover waiting in it is either conscientious bread-winning or satisfactory living. Julian pecks his way in blindness on the typewriter keyboard to escape from uselessness and despair. The happy ending is the beginning of wisdom for them all.

It is a good story enlivened with understanding, close to the reality of nice people in the apartment houses. It is all written with a sure touch in a craftsmanship admirable always. Yet somehow the book seems only as half lit with emotion as Julian's world of the half blind. There is, indeed, a good deal of light in it but not any fire.

Jonathan Daniels is the author of "A Southerner Discovers New England" and "A Southerner Discovers the South."



*From the book.*

**Doctor Dogbody**

# Gertrude Stein's France

*PARIS FRANCE.* By Gertrude Stein. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1940. 120 pages. With 8 reproductions of paintings, 4 in color. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HAROLD E. STEARNS

THE late Gilbert K. Chesterton once gave an ingenious parallel between the styles and philosophies of Meredith and Hardy. The literary approach of the first, he said, was notoriously complicated and to many obscure; that of the second was as notoriously simple and clear. Meredith, however, was an optimist, and his involutions and stylistic peculiarities were like the cheerful but sometimes inarticulate whistling of a man with a happy heart; while Hardy was a pessimist, and his directness and adoption of the concise and forthright were like the short articulate cries of a man for help.

I could not help but think of this contrast in reading Gertrude Stein's latest book, "Paris France." For once Miss Stein is concise, forthright, clear, and articulate—almost as if she hadn't time to bother to be anything else, almost as if she had forgotten to be literary. She wants to tell you what Paris and France and the French have meant to her; she wants to tell it to you simply and quickly; she wants you not to forget the civilization France represents and the spirit of order and frugality and moderation and good sense that is the instinctive tradition of every Frenchman—and so fervently does she want you not to forget, so much from her whole heart, that she has no time to waste in tricks of language. For once she has a simple, clear message. Language becomes again what it is in its origin—communication, the giving of an intelligent re-

port. For once she has largely forgotten about esthetic effects and how to string words together for intrinsic reasons of their own; the force of reality has burned away all false symbolism.

To be sure, a few of the old tricks remain—of spelling, blurring sentences, misuse of capitals, lack of punctuation—but they are hangovers which surprise rather than intrigue you. They serve to startle you into suddenly realizing that you are reading a Gertrude Stein who has chosen to become sane again in an insane world. The war has shocked her back again into that basic and native good sense which constitutes with her, as with everybody else, whatever real claim she has to genius. Go back to her earliest stories and her first book, "Three Lives," and see how, after years of wandering in the dalliance paths of verbal phantasmagoria, she has instinctively returned to an almost traditional use of the English language. Now that the reader does not have to put most of his attention on style (and is not the greatest style, after all, the one of which you are not aware?), he becomes interested less in Stein and more in that to which she calls attention. The subject has at last dominated and determined the manner of treating it. She may not realize it herself, but the civilization of France has finally conquered her rebellious and intransigent spirit. Just as all the pre-war literary "schools" of Paris—the Surrealists, the Fantasists, the Involutionists, and all the rest—have suddenly, in the glare of a dive-bombing reality, only a faint historical interest, so for Gertrude Stein, too, many of her own earlier *jeux d'esprit* (composed when one had time, in a peaceful world, to be absurd and playful) must now seem

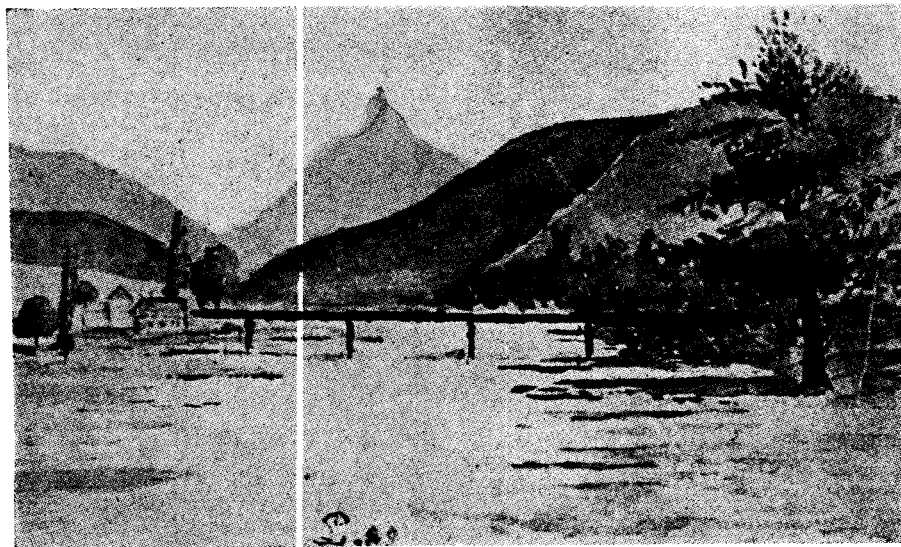


Gertrude Stein returns to the English language.

archaic and unreal. It is not so much that the manner has gone as that the subject has remained. In which, I believe, we have an advance reflection of what will happen also to French writers themselves. They likewise will return to the real French tradition of clearness and good sense and moderation—and may they ultimately cure their temporary conquerors with this spiritual vitamin.

Every person who has lived in France—in fact or in imagination—has his own answer. This book gives Gertrude Stein's answer, brief as it is. For by her, too, the truth of the old saying is once more illustrated: everyone has two countries; his own — and France. She has a good deal to say about French dogs, country cooking versus Paris restaurants, the strong attachment to and dependence upon their mothers of most Frenchmen, their fashions, their purer latinity (yes, keep the small letter) as compared with the Italians and the Spaniards. "To be latin," she shrewdly observes, "was to be civilized to be logical and to be fashionable"—and their native revolutionary tendency. She is worth a hundred dreary expositions when she writes: "All Frenchmen know that you have to become civilized between eighteen and twenty-three and that civilization comes upon you by contact with an older woman, by revolution, by army discipline, by any escape or by any subjections, and then you are civilized and life goes on normally in a latin way, life is then peaceful and exciting, life is then civilized, logical and fashionable in short life is life."

For myself, I found many substantial plums in this small pudding of a book.



Painting by Pierlot from the book.  
Landscape near Belley.