

# The New Books

## Art

**THE BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN TRADITION IN ART.** By Oskar Hagen. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1940. 159 pp., with index. \$3.50.

A healthy concern with significant fact, with the solid portrayal of American character in its environment, has been the constructive force in American art, a current often deflected by artists who, like Benjamin West, practised European mannerisms alien to our effort and our temper. These trace the "polarity" of Smibert and Feke, of West and Copley, of Stuart and Earl in the century before the Revolution, and do so with a freshness of interpretation, a shrewdness of argument, and a keenness of pictorial analysis which go far beyond the recording of artists' biographies and the quarrel over attributions.

Possessing wide knowledge of the European backgrounds of American painting, the author challenges old conceptions, and provides matter for new ones. He attributes the archaisms of the first colonial limners less to their dependence on European models than to their being "Sunday painters"—non-professionals, and for that reason independent of sophisticated tra-

dition. He describes for the first time Smibert's early career in Scotland, England, and Italy, and reinterprets the fragmentary known data concerning Feke in order to prove that Feke, not Smibert, was the constant in the American tradition, which he released from archaism by "setting out in search of the human being," instead of translating American reality into European stylism. He describes in detail the artistic London that Copley knew, and shows Benjamin West,—"Europe's worst daub, poor England's best,"—piecing together his "Erasmistratus" from fragments of David and Hamilton, prolonging the sterile and platitudinous eclecticism of Mengs and Battoni, and blighting three generations of American painters. Vigorously and with penetration he describes that richest and most beautiful flower of eighteenth century colonial painting, the work of Copley between 1765 and 1774, which "carried the colonial ideal to its classic consummation."

When Professor Hagen reproduces side by side Feke's "James Bowdoin" and Highmore's "Gentleman in a Murrey Velvet Coat," as evidence that Feke visited London in 1747, his comparison is less than convincing. And when he states that Charles Willson Peale "journeyed all the way from Annapolis to seek instruction from Copley," one recalls the fact that the young radical was forced to make that journey because his creditors in the Court Party threatened to put him in jail. As a whole, however, "The Birth of the American Tradition in Art" deals in a genuinely critical manner with a subject too often approached with inadequate scholarship or with no scholarship at all.

O. L.

## Miscellaneous

**MR. SMITH MEET MR. COHEN.** By James Waterman Wise and Lee J. Levinger. Reynal & Hitchcock. 1940. 182 pp. \$2.

This chatty little volume, the result of a collaboration by the son of Stephen S. Wise and a liberal reform rabbi, purports to explain the Jew to the uninformed non-Jew. Proving that the five million American Jews have their roots solidly implanted in native soil, the authors call upon history to testify. They report that Jews landed with Columbus, helped build Colonial America, patriotically fought during the revolutionary and subsequent wars.

Alarmed by the present wave of anti-semitism, Messrs. Wise and Levinger probe its economic base—if only superficially. They carefully differentiate between historical anti-semitism and that brewed by the current depression and Hitlerism. Debunking popular Jew-baiting horsechests, the semi-apologetic authors establish that Jews are mostly members of the

middle class; that they dominate in the arts more than in heavy industry; that there is no "single characteristic" of the American Jew.

"Mr. Smith, Meet Mr. Cohen" is sprinkled with easy-to-read facts. Early German-Jewish immigration is contrasted with the later Central-European influx. Aptly chronicled are the contradictions: the manifold (often superfluous) Jewish organizations. Examples: political, religious, fraternal, educational, social, youth, women, Palestinian, overseas relief, domestic relief, etc. "If American Jews are under-united," they are certainly over-organized," the authors observe with an urbane twinkle. Unfortunately, it is doubtful what effect this book will have on both Jews and non-Jews.

J. H. P.

## Travel

**OUR ARABIAN NIGHTS.** By Ruth and Helen Hoffman. Carrick & Evans. 1940. 307 pp. \$2.75.

It is as thin a tale, certainly, as the Iraqi air, but similarly it is invigorating after last season's sober travel books. Mere notions happen very interestingly to Ruth and Helen Hoffman, the American twins who "married an Englishman" and went to live with him in Iraq, but in this second book there are concrete adventures. They went, among many journeys, to visit the tribe of a Sumer Sheikh. They lived in the harem tent and shared both the excitements and the blissful monotony of tribal ways, gossiping with the women, learning their desert cosmetics, huddling with them during the raid when seventy-eight camels were stolen back by the tribe from which they had originally been stolen. Such raids, the result of blood feuds, were conducted in automobiles, and the Sheikh, wearing glasses, might carry his color camera to record them, but they were still as savage as in Al Rashid's time. The desert radio blared German propaganda in Arabic while the girls sat listening to tales of jinns, but the jinns were not the less real to the simple tribesmen.

But it is not for these physical excitements that the book is most appealing. It is for the exotic details of housekeeping, of shopping in Baghdad, of social relations in a small English community where to live on the wrong side of the Tigris is a national affront. The Hoffman twins can weigh character as nicely as they can design an iron chair or weave a rug out of coffin lining, and they have an ear—four ears acutely sensitive—for the dialogue of both Europeans and natives. Even their twenty-seven pets are doubly delightful in the authors' own line drawings. But we should feel it unfair to the reader not to advise him that the hare, named Tahir, was nicknamed Rabbit, and that the descendants of Boycat and Girlcat—both cats—were called Bunny Rabbit and Little Girl. Ya Allah!

H. D.

6 names

\$2.95

6 books

Whitman	Song of Myself
Thoreau	Life Without Principle
Hawthorne	Legends of the Province House
Irving	The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
Emerson	Compensation
Poe	A Descent into the Maelstrom

Each volume of the American Renaissance Series is illustrated by an artist whose talent fits the text; the buckram bindings are of different hues; sizes, uniform (5 x 7 inches); boxed. This is the most pleasurable and lasting bargain of which we know. Order a set to be placed with your other great books. 6 books originally published to sell for \$5, now \$2.95.

THE ARGUS BOOK SHOP  
16 No. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

## Just Published!

A New and Enlarged Edition of

# MODERN CHESS OPENINGS

Completely Revised  
by Reuben Fine

The Sixth Edition of one of Chessdom's most important books. "No student of chess can do without this compact volume."—London Observer. \$2.50, postpaid.

DAVID McKAY COMPANY  
604 So. Washington Square, Philadelphia  
Complete Catalog of Chess  
Books Mailed on Request

# Trade Winds

BY P. E. G. QUERCUS

**E**VEN the sapient Virgil was astonished that celestial minds are so prone to ire (Aeneid, I, 11). But if the Bishop of N. Y. really wants something to protest, how's about an advertiser's error of taste: the ads for Pall Mall cigarettes using as part of their trade emblem the motto traditionally sacred, *In Hoc Signo Vinces*. The worst pun of the income tax season was made by Old Q. He told the collector that he had worked so hard for his petty cash, it all had treadmilled edges.

★ ★

An Easter ad that pleased an oldtimer who is still a pushover for Kipling (at his best) was Saks-5th Avenue's, about *Failles on Parade*. Argosy Book Stores, 114 East 59, offer a First of *Sordello* (Moxon, 1840) for \$35, with the suggestion that "*Sordello* was to the 1840's what Gertrude Stein is to most of us." Collectors of Wilde should be interested in Argosy's copy of the poems by his mother "*Speranza*" (Dublin, 1860). The volume is dedicated to Willie and Oscar. (\$15).

★ ★

The best historical essay we have read in a long while is H. A. L. Fisher's "If Napoleon Had Escaped to America," in his volume *Pages from the Past* (Oxford Press). Mr. Fisher gives a delightful imaginary account of Napoleon's impressions of the U. S. (particularly Philadelphia, where the arrival of Mme. Walewska embarrassed him), his plans for South American empire, his eventual marriage in Peru, and death in a hurricane off Java. Try reading this superb tour de force aloud in a history-minded group. An unusual meeting was the Knot and Rope Festival held lately at the Hampshire Bookshop, Northampton, Mass. Miss Dodd invited the publisher and one of the authors of the remarkable *Encyclopaedia of Knots and Fancy Rope Work* to explain and show their skill. There was much enthusiasm shown; competitions held among local Boy Scouts, etc. Miss Dodd is specially keen about the possibilities of knotwork as amusement for invalids. She herself, when in hospital some years ago, was very happy for two weeks weaving heavy cord into lanyards. It does Old Q.'s heart good when he hears of a bookseller going to town on a specialized book like that.

★ ★

Speaking of tales of sea and adventure, Dodd Mead have a corker on the way, *The Wandering Years* by Weston Martyr. Any bookseller who will read that one can sell it. A review that specially pleased Old Q. was Charles Poore's (*N. Y. Times*) of Housman's *Collected Poems*—which, he suggests, "is destined to give the

rest of this year's books a lesson in longevity." Another excellent phrase of Mr. Poore's is about "executors middletonmurrying around" among an author's papers.

★ ★

Mrs. J. L. Defandorf writes us very entertainingly about the mock trial held by the College Women's Club of Milwaukee. The heroine of a recent novel was called to the stand to testify, impersonated by a charming and courageous member; others served as attorneys for prosecution and defence. The jury was specially warned "not to be catty about Kitty." The verdict was "Read the book and decide for yourself," and the club adjourned for a White Collar luncheon. Harcourt, Brace & Co. have done nothing to discourage the formation of the International Society of Simenon Fanciers, which carries on its letterhead the pleasing jowl of Inspector Maigret and a notable list of claqueurs, the whole alphabet from Djuna Barnes to Stefan Zweig. Lippincott's have been sending out a lively series of postcards illustrating and quoting from Harold W. Thompson's savory album of York State folklore, *Body, Boots and Britches*.

★ ★

The spring frogs are very late this year: they have not yet been heard at the Fantods, L. I. (writing March 17)—perhaps it is due to what Mrs. Alice Bailey calls (in a pamphlet that reached us lately) the present Karmic events. Human beings (and perhaps batrachians too?) are getting their Karma or come-uppance. "The Shamballa energy is making its impact upon humanity directly, not stepped down as hitherto through transmission via the Hierarchy of Masters." Those of good will may learn more about this from the U. S. Unit of Service, 11 W. 42. William J. Henneman, formerly with the Argus Bookshop, has set up for himself at 2427 Eastwood Avenue, Chicago. In his first list Mr. Henneman makes an "earnest and urgent recommendation" of Mortimer Adler's *How to Read a Book*. Among interesting offers listed by Henneman is a First of *The Way of All Flesh* for \$35.

★ ★

The Free Library of Philadelphia has on display until April 14 an exhibition of 150 years of Printing in English America, 1640-1790, from the collection of Dr. Rosenbach. The copy of the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), the first book in English printed in America, was found some years ago in Ireland. Another Chicagoan who has gone into business on his own is Max Siegel, late of Carson, Pirie, Scott. Mr. Siegel, author as well as bookseller, is at the Pittsfield Bldg., Washington & Wabash, Chicago.

In honor of the rich accounts of good Baltimore food sprinkled through Mr. Mencken's *Happy Days*, the Society of Gourmets, presided over by Mr. J. George Frederick, is giving a Baltimore Dinner to Mr. Mencken, in New York, on April 3. We hope on that occasion Mr. Mencken will moderate some of his comments (which astounded us) on the oyster as something not much relished in Baltimore? Sam Kravitt, photographer (14 East 44) has his own ideas about things. He has photographed everything from World's Fair construction work to the hands of a famous Curator of Rare Books. The latter because Sam saw that the curator's tender clutch of an old folio was the essence of him; more so, maybe, than a portrait of his phiz. But Mr. Kravitt says he'd almost rather take photos of poets than any other subject: because "a poet is always wearing a top hat in his mind." He likes taking pictures of people either when they're feeling proud or feeling licked, no half-way moods.

★ ★

"What a poem means," said T. S. Eliot in a lecture one time, "is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author." An Old Mandarin we know once put it thus:—

If every other poet  
Means as much more than he says  
As I do  
How shall I read poetry intelligently?



## "An American 'Citadel'"

The story of a young doctor torn between passion for his wife and his desire to serve humanity... Second printing before publication...

# AND SO DEDICATED

A novel by  
**THOMAS BURTON**

\$2.50 at all book stores

HARRISON-HILTON BOOKS, Inc. N. Y.