

by Downes and Siegmeister—and of these, some forty are found in the older volume. But where Sandburg sometimes, exasperatingly, gives only the unaccompanied tune, Siegmeister always gives a playable, singable rendering. His is, on the whole, the greater unity, as is to be expected in a volume stemming all from one hand, unlike Sandburg's, which includes arrangements from many hands. The famous "St. James Infirmary Blues," for example, gains new vigor and freshness in Siegmeister's version. Unhappily Siegmeister, too, fails to give guitar notations, an omission for which this amateur minstrel has never been able to forgive Sandburg, the guitarist.

Of course singers and players may quarrel over certain of the Downes-Siegmeister selections. It is hard to understand, for example, why so flat a version of the beautiful "Foggy Dew" should have been picked. Workers' songs, too, seem to have been slighted, though young Woody Guthrie, the dust-bowl minstrel, is very properly represented by two of his finest, including the "Ballad of Tom Joad." On the other hand, one misses Leadbelly, the great Negro minstrel—but perhaps there were copyright reasons.

"A Treasury of American Song" is more than merely a book of music. It is a writing book too. There are some 30,000 words of text—some of it repetitious and long-winded, much of it full of interest, though one may well doubt how much of it will ever be widely read. Songbooks after all are meant to be sung rather than read. In point of fact, this strummer has learned more about songs from the ordinary twenty-five cent collections peddled far and wide than from any learned treatise.

The book is marred by minor flaws. The editing is indifferent, to say the least, with misspellings, typographical errors, and stranded footnotes. "In a myriad different forms, it is not confined to the Kentucky mountains, however," we read on page 29, to cite but one example of unkempt style. Even more annoying is the unnecessary carrying over of verses to the next page, which occasionally leaves the impression as though the book had been padded. But as a book it is well made. It stands up straight on the music rack and opens flat. It will withstand the wear and tear it ought to get. There is an index. Perhaps it is caviling to harp upon the minor imperfections in a book that will give so much pleasure to every purchaser, and that undoubtedly will find its well-deserved way into many a Christmas stocking (it will have to be a sizable stocking—the book measures ten by thirteen inches).

Actor and Critic

HORACE WALPOLE. By R. W. Ketton-Cremer. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1940. 368 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LEONARD BACON

THIS is the first good biography of Horace Walpole, and it is very good indeed. From the enormous mass of much-worked material Mr. Ketton-Cremer has succeeded in extracting the radio-active pure elements. And he has done it with such intelligence and skill that the reader will be apt to overlook the laborious research which has gone into the satisfaction of his interest. Mr. Ketton-Cremer's mind is judgmatic and penetrating, and these important qualities are to be seen in every sentence. He knows all about his fascinating subject, but he says only what is necessary to be said.

The reviewer has known Walpole's letters pretty well for twenty years, but has no hesitation in admitting that in some respects this work has modified the ideas which had formed in his mind with respect to the best correspondent in the history of English literature. For one thing it is clear that Walpole was a more important figure behind the English political scene than he himself would lead us to suppose. His own modesty, genuine or affected, has brought it to pass that it is easier to think of him as an amiable gossip exchanging items of psychological interest with Lady Howard or Madame duDeffand than as a harried go-between dashing from a petulant minister to an arrogant general, in a desperate effort to make a workable government work. He seems to have been for quite a long interval a necessary lubricant in the machinery of the tiny society which ruled the empire. And Mr. Ketton-Cremer

makes it clear that for once Walpole was nearly as much an actor as a critic of the drama.

But he makes no idol of his hero. In one sentence he puts his finger on Walpole's glory and his shame, explaining at a stroke what has bewildered and fascinated even the most casual and superficial reader. "Walpole," he says, "seldom came well out of a relation in which his personal detachment was called in question." His whole merit and art was to be a spectator of what was fun to record. He loved a masquerade where safely hidden one could watch. And if by chance he was dragged into the whirlpool of action, he was as uncomfortable as his own cat drowning in the fish-bowl. Far better for him the observation-post of Strawberry Hill where he could do what he instinctively knew to be his stuff. And he resented the intrusion of any passion, love, hatred, or ambition, because they were blinding things that, at the very least made the mind myopic, if they did not cause an incurable cataract. Nevertheless, those passions were matters of intense interest and subjects of delightful speculation when viewed from a safe distance—in others. By a sort of absorption-spectrum analysis, we easily discover more than traces of those psychological elements in Walpole's remarkable alloy.

The point has been made before and will be again. There are three British writers who are classics of self-revelation. Pepys set down everything as unconscious of an audience, as if he had been a blind goldfish. Boswell in agony exposed every convolution of his soul in hopes of an audience he feared he might never get. Walpole, who knew the theatre would be thronged for his monologue (and even saw to it), preferred implication and suggestion. His withdrawals and sudden silences tell almost as much as the blunt simplicities of Pepys, or the half-conscious indiscretion of Boswell. Each of the three knows his business. And they are no more to be compared than perfect examples of different styles of architecture. Yet together they are so to say supplementary angles that complete the arc from horizon to horizon.

Mr. Ketton-Cremer has brought out his book in a time as tremendous as any of the furious decades through which Walpole passed in unexampled contemplative calm. No such book could be written on the hag-ridden continent of Europe. It takes the English to write what is pleasant, elegant, and detached as his hero hoped to be and seldom in reality was, in a world where things grow ugly, brutal, and related to nameless horror. The reviewer for one is all admiration.



Horace Walpole

(Continued from page 4)

Now the chances are that he is not through at all, or rather that he is through only for a while. Every writer knows those recurrent periods of feeling that he will never have another idea or be able to write another line; and in the course of time he snaps out of it, after he has taken enough time off to recharge his batteries. But if he has been making good money and has spent most of it—as he probably has, for when the money is coming in it is inconceivable, to the average author, that this sort of thing may not go on forever—he finds it very difficult to take time off while the expenses are going on at the same old rate; and while magazine editors are expecting him to produce at the same rate. For what the magazine editor wants is something that will build up, or keep up, the circulation; and well-known names, well known to the readers of that magazine as well as to the general public, are the thing that is most likely to do it. Accordingly, if you sell any given magazine ten stories in a year, you will get more for each story than if you sold them only three stories a year. It may well be that three stories, three good stories, are all you have in you that year; but if your production falls off your price is likely, soon-

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HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY, N. Y.

er or later, to fall off too. So you write your three good stories; and then you use the tricks of the trade that you have learned, and your knowledge of the tastes of the editors of that particular magazine, to knock off seven more stories that are good enough—good enough to sell with the advantage of a name well known to the magazine's readers, even though they might be sent back if they came up from Joe Blotz of Podunk Corners.

Such is the history of most writers, whether they begin with that dangerously successful novel or by writing for the magazines direct, in the hope of thereby laying up enough money to afford to write novels. Twenty years ago there were fewer pulp magazines than there are now; but some of those magazines, edited by such men as Bob Davis, Arthur Sullivan Hoffman, Kenneth Littauer, and the late Charles Agnew MacLean, were of much higher quality than any of today's pulps with

perhaps one exception. In those days most writers got their start with the pulps, and in those days you could compress the history of almost any successful writer into a sentence: He wrote his best stuff for the pulps at two or three cents a word, and spent the rest of his life rewriting it for the slicks, for ten or twenty times as much money. Not so many successful writers now come up from the pulps; a man who has the peculiar talent demanded by the pulps of today is apt to go on writing for them under ten or twelve aliases. But the general principle is still true. Whereunto shall the typical author be likened? Unto an oil well, which when you first shoot it blows off uproariously—a gusher; but whose flow gradually slackens until eventually you have to pump. Much of the work seen today in the magazines under well-known names is proof that a skilful operative can keep the pump going a long time.

It may be felt that a disproportionate amount of time has been devoted to one aspect of the economics of authorship; but it is a branch of the industry that probably supports more writers than any other, and it happens to be the one with which I am most familiar. Twelve years ago, when I finished a novel, I suddenly felt that I had no more to say in that form and at that length, and several subsequent attempts to start a novel gave me no reason to change my opinion. For eleven years after that I lived on magazine fiction—mostly short fiction, with a few serials; some of it every year was good, at least as good as anything else I ever wrote; but sometimes I had to pump. Some of you may feel that I have omitted some other aspects of magazine writing—criticisms of their stereotyped formulae, their taboos and limitations. Well, I think very little of these criticisms. Perhaps it is merely my age that makes me feel that you find more good fiction in the mass-circulation magazine than in the small publications self-consciously devoted to Art; I was suckled in a creed outworn, the idea that a story should have some form and some point, and I may merely set myself down as superannuated in confessing little taste for the shapeless and pointless evocations of a mood which the art magazines are apt to give us. I do know this, however—that whatever the limitations of the mass-circulation magazines, they are all (or almost all) better than they need to be. They may try to give an immense public what the editors think it wants, but what they actually give it comes much nearer reflecting the taste of the educated and intelligent men who edit the magazine than of the average of the millions who read it. Some taboos there are, though far fewer and far

less stringent than they used to be; but the only really valid and important criticism of magazine fiction is that there is too much of it. An enormous industry is hungry for fuel, it must publish more fiction than there is of good fiction; but any editor I ever met would rather publish a good story than a bad one, and is perfectly willing to break all his own taboos, once in a while, in favor of a story that is good enough.

Various high-minded persons speak with contempt of the magazines; but the magazines, like the movies, are very seldom snooted by people who are good enough to sell them something. There are exceptions; and one of them deserves notice, as a unique example of self-abnegation. Miss Margaret Mitchell, as we all know, wrote a novel that made a great deal of money. Most of that money was made in one year, and accordingly the Treasury took the greater part of it. Nevertheless Miss Mitchell was in a position to cash in on her success; she knew perfectly well, by all the canons and precedents of the literature industry, that any of the big magazines would pay her fifty thousand dollars, or maybe more, for her next serial—sight unseen, no matter what its theme or its quality. Good or bad, she could get fifty thousand for it; and for the serial after that, and so on, for at the very least ten years. But so far Miss Mitchell has not produced any serial, though four years have gone by; alone of authors of whom we have knowledge, she seems resolved not to write any more till she has something more to say. This attitude is worthy of a Nobel Prize.

The foregoing article in somewhat expanded form constituted the fifth of the Bowker lectures delivered under the auspices of the New York Public Library. The complete text appears in the Bulletin of the Library for November, 1940.

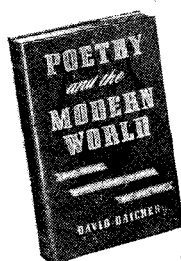
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In Old Virginia

TORCHBEARER OF THE REVOLUTION. *The Story of Bacon's Rebellion and its Leader.* By Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1940. 237 pp., with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by H. J. ECKENRODE

COLONIAL history is generally so dull that it will come as a surprise to many readers to know that one of the most picturesque and dramatic episodes in American annals took place in Virginia as long ago as 1675. This was the first serious revolt against royal authority in the colonies, a rebellion against taxation and arbitrary government. It was led by a young man of charming personality and strong character, Nathaniel Bacon, a relative of the immortal Lord Bacon. The insurrection was characteristic of early American life, involving a cavalier governor, an Indian war, marches for distances through dense forests, a town burning, and battles in which ardor was not the less evident because the contestants were few in number. Contrasted strikingly were the splendid young tribune, burning to right the wrongs of the common people, and the testy, narrow-minded, vindictive old Sir William Berkeley, the perfect type of autocratic old age festering under the remem-

brance of injuries and humiliation. Bacon triumphed and then sickened and died. Victorious in the end, Berkeley eclipsed in cruelty anything else in colonial history by executing a number of the rebels and by numerous confiscations and fines. The democratic party in the colony was ruined and did not hold up its head again for ages.

Professor Wertenbaker has told this engrossing story with sound scholarship and restrained literary art. He has not added much to our knowledge of the rebellion, but that is probably because no new sources have come to light. He does bring out many facts about the family and early life of his hero.

His estimate of the situation in Virginia in 1676 is substantially correct. His view of Bacon himself may be a little too favorable. Bacon, who began the revolt as an Indian killer (whence his popularity), is not free from blame for his treatment of a tribe of friendly Indians that assisted him against hostiles; Bacon attacked and slew most of the friendlies and looted their village. The plea of necessity may be good and the facts are so obscure that it is difficult to pass judgment; but it is certain that he did not err on the side of leniency.

Persons interested in this vital chapter of our annals will find the little volume to be both instructive and fascinating.

Artistic Fabulist

FABLES FOR OUR TIME. By James Thurber. New York: Harper & Bros. 1940. 124 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRED SCHWED, JR.

A STUDIOUS perusal of James Thurber's slim and wonderful work suggests a comparison with the "Fables" of La Fontaine which is almost inescapable. But we shall escape, because I mislaid my copy of La Fontaine back in Junior year, and besides, I have forgotten how to read French since then.

Anyway, it would not have been a fair contest, because La Fontaine was in no position to persuade Thurber to illustrate his Fables. But Thurber, the fabulist, easily engages the invaluable services of Thurber, the scratch-pad artist. These ectoplasmic figures, seemingly executed in a telephone booth between wrong numbers, enhance his Fables more dynamically than the work of any other artist could, had he had a selection from Cimabue to Margaret Bourke-White. The little figures of animals and people depict every human mood save nobility and serenity. This is no lack, since there doesn't happen to be any serenity or nobility in the Fables. On the other hand, Thurber the extra-free hand drawer, is perhaps at his magnificent best when it comes to dismay and frus-

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