

# Leisure Is So Arduous

**THE REIGN OF BEAU BRUMMELL.**  
By Willard Connelly. New York: The Greystone Press. 1940. 296 pp., with index. \$2.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

"WHO breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?" A moralist now and then, no doubt, though rarely as completely as Pope broke Lord Hervey; but it is more rewarding financially, and perhaps also esthetically, to write a witty, wistful, and only slightly patronizing biography of the butterfly. Several such have already been written about that peer of English gentlemen and dandies, the Etonian George Brummell, whose grandfather, the valet of Charles Monson, M. P., had been a very Jeeves among eighteenth-century gentleman's gentlemen. And indeed Brummell's life is no fit subject for a heavy pen, though the social historian may perhaps be permitted to find in it interesting material for a study of the arduous career of conspicuous leisure, as well as good evidence for the fact, so disconcerting to American prejudices, that being a gentleman in the England of the Regency was a career as open to talent as any other possible career. A valet's grandson would have a more difficult time being a gentle-

man in twentieth-century America.

Certainly Mr. Willard Connelly's is not the heavy pen of the social historian. He writes, with due indebtedness to Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, the only sort of life of Brummell that seems permissible—anecdotal, allusive, light, sympathetic. The anecdotes he has checked as carefully as anecdotes about so legendary a figure can ever be checked, and although it would no doubt be unfair to weigh down description of his work with the epithet "scholarly," it must at least be recorded that he winnows out his facts thoroughly, that he sticks—better than Strachey did—to his biographer's last. This life of Brummell is not recommended to persons with a strong social conscience, a sense of the world's wrongs. It will only annoy, or perhaps infuriate, them at a time when there is very little to soothe them. Even the fact that Brummell came to a very bad, and very prolonged, end, dying in shocking premature senility early in his sixties after nearly thirty years of hand-to-mouth exile in France, will hardly console them. But for less morally sensitive persons, who retain even in these preoccupied days a taste for the *comédie humaine*, Mr. Connelly's task will afford a few pleasant hours of escape.

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

| Title and Author  | Crime, Place, and Sleuth  | Summing Up   | Verdict            |
|---|---|--|--------------------|
| HUSH, GABRIEL<br>Veronica Parker Johns<br>(Duell, Sloan & Pearce: \$2.)             | Medico house guest on Virgin Islands estate doubly slain. Hostess's older sister and local official finally fathom extremely odd affair.            | Eye-opening dialog, lush Caribbean color, cleverly concealed killer, gobs of action, and wind-up with potent punch.                              | Prime and pungent! |
| THE CORPSE WITH THE LISTENING EAR<br>Laurence Dwight Smith<br>(Mystery House: \$2.) | Surgical mallet and almost untraceable poison finish off two famous Manhattan medicos and nurse who cramped killer's style. Budding doctor detects. | Method of killer is ingenious and reason for inexplicable removal of public benefactors satisfactorily explained, but telling is pretty painful. | Run-of-mill        |
| DEATH COMES TO TEA<br>Theodora DuBois<br>(Houghton, Mifflin: \$2.)                  | Tea party blunder by refugee youngster has fatal results for lovely but dominating lassie. Jeff McNeill, M.D., scents clever homicide.              | Shows how science, improperly applied, can commit crime that ties hands of law. Speedy, bright, and well documented.                             | Good grade         |
| TRAPPED<br>Hammond Innes<br>(Putnam: \$2.)  | London drama critic on sea-coast holiday in early days of War surprises Nazi spy, and is carried to strange rendezvous.                             | Dramatically handled yarn of Hitler's U-boats operating from base beneath Britain, and how brave Cornishmen exterminated the lot.                | Hair-raiser        |
| IN THE FACE OF THE VERDICT<br>John Rhode<br>(Dodd, Mead: \$2.)                      | Two British brothers meet death by drowning within week of each other, which causes Dr. Priestley et al. considerable work.                         | Ingenious murder-by-mirrors is high point of painstakingly-worked-out example of dogged-deduction-does-it type of mystery.                       | Fun—but fatiguing  |

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By  
**Margaret Armstrong**

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## Charlie-Chaplinade

AMERIKA. By Franz Kafka. Translated by Edwin Muir. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions. 1940. 299 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAUL ROSENFELD

CHAPLIN'S films hadn't been produced when well before 1913 Kafka commenced work on "Amerika." Hence the wonder of the fact that this first of the Bohemian's long novels startlingly resembles the great comedian's movies. The common derivation of Chaplin and "Amerika" from Dickens and their refinements on him alone account for the similarity. . . . As in the succeeding, equally fragmentary components of Kafka's trilogy of novels, "The Trial" and "The Castle," the narrative here is made up of grotesque, macabre, at times horrible analogies and symbols that body forth the Infinite and the underlying Idea of all phenomena. Only, unlike that of the later works, this narrative is picaresque and farcical, the loosely-strung, slapstick story of the continual frustrations and vital miscarriages of a little inadequate hero. In its subtle pathos the undertone also is Chaplinesque.

A sensitive feeling characteristic of Kafka but distinctly that of his younger, relatively happier years projected itself in the story. Basically a believer but acutely a neurotic, he had met with the "metaphysical catastrophe" of the loss of all sense of partnership between God and Man. An ob-

scure, indefinable wrong seemed to him at the root of life, rendering irrational the concept of justice. In pre-war years Kafka nonetheless felt this irony more comically than he later did. He still believed in the existence of natural and social forces balancing the original injustice, providing a prospect of eventual salvation on earth and opportunities for the removal of his personal complexes and immedicable sense of guilt. Playfully he expressed his dream of the gradual if inevitably checkered victory possible to the race, with a droll account of the human soul's adventures as an immigrant in a delightfully unrealistic "land of opportunity"; and symbolized with the figures of the benevolent hotel-manageress and the WPA-like project of the "Nature-Theatre in Oklahoma," the liberalism which strives to create a place for his green young "hero" in the world.

Possibly his "Chaplinade" is not as solid and stirring a performance as is "The Castle." The narrative technique is uncertain: some of the chapters are distinctly the inferiors of others and give color to the suspicion that Kafka actually had only one great book in him. The dream-like tale in the present edition has the further disadvantage of association with sometimes irrelevant, frequently disagreeable, illustrations by Emlen Etting. Yet "Amerika" remains wonderfully full of the fantasy, wit, and poetry unmistakably Kafka's own; nor for all its mannered Anglicism is Edwin Muir's translation unworthy of the original's characteristically crystalline, homely, perfect prose.

## Americantown

THE CITY ON THE HILL. By Marian Sims. Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company. 1940. 357 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JOSEPH F. DINNEEN

THIS city is on a hill in North Carolina, but it is also among the hills of New England, and it is larger and magnified in Cook County and in what were once the mudflats of New Jersey. This is fast becoming the pattern of the typical American city, and Marian Sims strips it stark naked and stabs the sepsis in its anatomy with a sterile, razor-sharp probe. She knows lower courts intimately; the regulars and transients who come before them for justice, and she shows you that they sometimes get it because there are liberals on the bench.

Marian Sims is a superb reporter. These courtroom scenes were never devised in her imagination. They are too sharp for that. She was there. She saw them. Her characters are real, flesh and blood. She set herself a stiff assignment and turned in a swell job. Here are the causes of consumptive government, the alliance between city financier, the ministers' association, purblind moralists, and bootleggers (the state has a liquor problem), and she shows you what actuates and motivates them. Against this background she tells of the life and loves of a likable group of idealists and liberals; and there's nothing phoney about them.

It is a battle for the most part between father and son with innocent bystanders among family and friends taking it occasionally on the chin. Father is a reactionary—the kind of a reactionary you can understand, not a labeled dummy put there to play straight man to a stage antagonist. You can disagree with the financier-father, and still have some sympathy for his point of view. You may have met him after Bible class on a Sunday afternoon, and if for no other reason you admire him because the s.o.b. is consistent. There are Chandlers in every town.

There are two things that recommend this book. One is a good fiction story, and if it escapes the boys in Hollywood, they've missed a good bet. The other is the machinery of politics as it grinds against the courts. Steve Chandler, his sister Kate, and his pal, Dr. Alan Cummings, are something like the skeptics that educators have been condemning themselves for turning out during the last ten years, but Miss Sims seems to have them on the right track, battering down prejudice and intolerance, not with preachments, but with entertaining dialogue.



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