

The Reserve of "Peter" Stern

ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST.
By G. B. Stern. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1941. 349 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by R. ELLIS ROBERTS

WHAT shows most conspicuously in this desultory, enticing, and ingenious volume of recollection, comment, reverie, and imagination is the sheer gallantry of the author. Those who know "Peter" Stern know that she is a Character, of the same breed as the great characters of an earlier day in England. Though she lived many years in London, and in Albany, that stronghold of masculine reserve, she has never been a Londoner at heart: Kensington in her early days—yes; but Holland Park is no more London than Long Island is Manhattan.

There is no formal autobiography in this book. At times I find the masterly disregard of chronology a little maddening; and many readers will regret that G. B. Stern is, on the whole, so severely unegotistic. There is enough to show how determined she has been in her craft, how bravely she has struggled against personal disasters and extreme ill-health; but there is not enough about the writing of her books.

The danger, of course, is when an author is over-confident that, since he is tickled to death, so must his readers be—a danger G. B. Stern has not always escaped. "Love me, love my book" is a demand very few authors can safely make.

G. B. Stern frequently rebukes J. M. Barrie for his indulgence in whimsy: it is hard to believe this affectionate petulance springs from anything but a needless alarm at the same characteristic in her own work. For G. B. Stern is a passionate whimsy-addict. Under the bad advice of a good critic, E. V. Lucas, she tried realism; but puckishness darted over the fence, and she is always most herself when she lets her fancy free.

She can overdo it—for my taste. I shudder a little at her deplorably winsome dogs surrounded by adoring Legs; and her gallant determination to find Fun in all kinds of people and circumstances too often clouds her natural critical gift. I have rarely read anything more sombre than her entranced account of a Christmas Eve in the South of France—the party sounds like a bargain-sale at a demolished exhibition-ground. But there, if you have a gift for whimsy and a habit of wearing rose-tinted spectacles, you can not always remember when these aids to light living are inappropriate.

There is some admirable literary

criticism in "Another Part of the Forest." The most devoted admirers of Jane Austen will be content with G. B. Stern's praise and analysis: she is sound on such neglected geniuses as F. Anstey, and sound on our incomparable P. G. Wodehouse, and that prophet of his age, still misunderstood and underestimated, G. K. Chesterton. For these I can forgive her lumping the witty, astringent Rhoda Broughton with Helen Mathers and Mrs. Hungerford, those strawberry-blonde novelists. I hope her praise of Neil Lyons, that superb miniaturist of Cockney and Essex common people will cause a new demand for his short stories. She writes about poetry as one who believes poetry should be enjoyed; but I do not know whence she derived the fallacy that "A Shropshire Lad" was written when A. E. Housman was twenty. The poet was thirty-seven when the book was published; and few of the poems were written, I fancy, before his thirtieth year.

G. B. Stern has lectured, and enjoyed it; and some of the most amusing anecdotes in her book touch on the lecturer's experiences. Like all British visitors here, she is amazed and grateful when confronted by the



G. B. Stern

appetite for lectures shown in these States, and especially by the appetite for lectures at morning hours which the idler English regard as definitely unaired. Her oddest adventure while lecturing was, however, in England. At the end of a talk on "Family Life down the Ages, in Fiction, Drama and Fact" an impressive woman, "her corsage crusted with diamonds and her snow-white hair piled Pelion upon Ossa," demanded "What about Boadicea?" That stumped an author who has rarely been unequal to any challenge from her admirers.

With a Capital "R"

THE INCURABLE ROMANTIC. By Roderick Peattie. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1941. 270 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN HODGDON BRADLEY

RODERICK PEATTIE has been a professor of geography at Ohio State University for the past twenty years. If this fact seems categorically to exclude romance, one need only read a few pages from any chapter of this fine autobiography to discover one's mistake. Peattie does not answer to the customary description of a college professor, nor does his geography resemble in the least the grade school subject that has saddened the lives of so many children.

Our author, as a matter of fact, is a comfortable sort of man who likes to relax in a bad posture with a pipe between his teeth, a gold band on his ring finger, and an expression which seems to say, "I know all your weaknesses but I like you just the same." So much we gather from the frontispiece portrait, but one must read the book to feel the gusto with which this incurable romantic has worked, played, traveled, fought, and loved his way through the first fifty years of life.

Just what does it mean to be incurably romantic? Presumably it means

first of all to be endowed with rugged health, a lively imagination, and a warm heart. It is to enjoy action more than reflection, adventure more than routine, brightness more than gloom. It is to fear boredom more than insecurity, to risk error for the sake of drama, to keep flexibly open-minded in the face of change but rigidly individualistic in the presence of mass intolerance. In short, it means living the sort of life which men in appalling and ever increasing numbers are finding it utterly impossible to live: a life of happiness and freedom.

Peattie has been lucky and he knows it. But in this chatty and often witty chronicle of his activities at home and abroad, his lusty enthusiasm for life never degenerates into self-satisfaction. His exultant sentimentality seldom becomes solemn. His prose, which is characteristically forceful, seldom becomes forced. Throughout, the reader feels the vitality, independence, and above all the humaneness of a very human human geographer. He also feels the richness of the environment that nourished so rich a life, an environment which with the help of God and perhaps a few marines we may yet be able to preserve in one corner of the earth.

The Daydream in Literature

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

WHEN the present world disturbance is over, and the search for truth, rejected by one party to the quarrel, is revalidated as a rightful activity for man, we can return to the proper occupation of this century, namely the study of the human mind along the lines suggested by Freud and his colleagues. No lasting peace or progress can be expected until the springs of human motive are better understood, and while many of Freud's conclusions are obviously erroneous, the correctness of his method, entirely fresh in human history, is continually being substantiated by human examples. Miss Ratchford's scholarly study* of Brontë *juvenilia* provides one of these examples, and contributes to the search for truth in two respects, the literary and the psychological.

"I have had a curious packet confided to me," wrote Mrs. Gaskell in her "Life of Charlotte Brontë," "containing an immense amount of manuscript, in an inconceivably small space; tales, dramas, poems, romances, written principally by Charlotte, in a hand which it is almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass." She then prints a facsimile page of one of these small manuscripts, gives a list of Charlotte's "works" in this writing, quotes Charlotte's account of the establishment of the Brontë Island plays and her letter about the presiding Island genii, and makes some shrewd comments about the dreamy habits of children who live secluded lives. And that is all the reference she makes to those precious Brontë *juvenilia*. Now Mrs. Gaskell was a careful and honest biographer. She quotes, later, passages from Charlotte's letters which reveal that "fiery imaginations" haunted Charlotte and made real society "wretchedly insipid" to her; she also observes that all the Brontë sisters "made out perpetually," i.e., continually made up stories. But she did not perceive the connection between the manuscript booklets and the fiery imaginations, the perpetual makings-out, still less between the booklets and the Brontë novels; the crucial words Northangerland, Angria, Zamorna, and Gondal do not even figure in her index! The scripts were accordingly not regarded as a unit of any significance,

but simply as separate curiosities; they passed to the hazards of the auction room, and are at present widely scattered through America and England. Miss Ratchford tells us that, in a research lasting twenty years, she has tracked down and transcribed more than a hundred of these scripts. (I have often looked at the tiny scripts, one of them arranged beneath a magnifying glass, in the Haworth Parsonage, Haworth being only ten miles across the moors from my own Yorkshire home, so I know the immense labor implied by this brief statement.) Her present volume is a critical study of the manuscripts thus collated. Of the first importance to every Brontë student, it reveals the profound significance of these juvenile scripts as the laboratory of the Brontë novels, and the absolute necessity of knowing their contents if a true interpretation is to be placed on the Brontë lives. It illuminates also, or at least offers new materials for the study of, the strange psychology of the creative writing process.

Miss Ratchford has discovered that these scripts are all part of an epic, a saga, a cycle; that each script, from whichever Brontë hand, and whether written as drama, verse, fiction, essay, or whatever, relates to the same imaginary country and to the same set of characters, to whose history it makes a definite contribution. Put briefly, this imaginary world shows the Duke of Wellington ruling over the confederated states headed by Glass Town; later his son, the Marquis of Douro, takes chief place and becomes Duke of Zamorna and Emperor of Angria. Zamorna's contest with the villainous Earl of Northangerland, his conquests, his captures, his many loves,

are related with an exuberant detail, a really prodigious fertility of invention. That Zamorna, Northangerland, and other characters of this huge body of imaginary tradition have strong resemblances to, and are in fact prototypes of, such Brontë characters as Rochester, John Graham Bretton, Emanuel Paul, and the Moore brothers is not to be doubted after reading Miss Ratchford's quotations.

At first all four Brontës shared this Angrian saga; presently Emily and Anne retired to their own equally imaginary island of Gondal, leaving Charlotte and Branwell to conduct Angrian affairs alone. The Gondal scripts are unfortunately not extant, except in one amazing respect; it seems that many of Emily's poems belong to the Gondal cycle, and are written as the expression of Gondal feelings and Gondal situations. The difference this makes to the customary interpretation of the Brontës' mutual feelings, is very great. The legend of the close friendship of Branwell and Emily, founded on the "Do I condemn" poem, is greatly weakened, since the poem was perhaps written to express the feeling of a Gondalian, not that of Emily for her brother. The legend of Branwell's participation in "Wuthering Heights" is pretty well destroyed, since the Heathcliff-Cathie situation is depicted in several poems belonging to the Gondal saga, in which Branwell never had any part.

The literary importance of Miss Ratchford's work is therefore very great, since it both corrects the Brontë history and illuminates the creation of their work. But it has also a more general and psychological value.

I do not know whether daydream worlds of the Angria type are created by a large proportion of the world's children, but that they are created by many children who are later destined to become novelists I am quite sure, for so many fictions show familiarity with such worlds. Look at Barrie's "Sentimental Tommy" and "Mary Rose." Look at Du Maurier's "Peter Ibbetson." Look at—of all unexpected novelists!—Kipling, who has used the common possession of such a dream world as the foundation of love, in "The Brushwood Boy." At one time I kept a list of such daydream worlds occurring in fiction, but alas, the list is at this moment on the other side of the Atlantic. It is not at all uncommon.

(Continued on page 18)



—From the drawing by George Richmond.

Charlotte Brontë

*THE BRONTËS' WEB OF CHILDHOOD. By Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford. New York: Columbia University Press. 1941. 293 pp., with appendices and index. \$5.50.