

# Re-discovery of a Classic

*THE IMITATION OF CHRIST. From the First Edition of an English Translation Made c. 1530 by Richard Whitford. Edited with an Introduction by Edward J. Klein. New York: Harper & Bros. Originally published in 1941. Pocket edition now in preparation. 261 pp. \$3.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

**T**HOMAS à KEMPIS, who, if the reference books are accurate, lived to be about ninety-one, 1380-1471, wrote "De Imitatione Christi," which has been translated into more languages than any other book except the Bible. The best original Latin MS is at Brussels, dated 1441. The first English translation was in 1460 and the latest edition before Dr. Klein's, came in 1941.

One might think, considering the vast and enduring popularity of the work, and the number of English translations, that there was small justification for a new edition. One would be mistaken. Dr. Klein has made important discoveries, has succeeded in establishing for the first time another classic in *English* literature, and has given us what should henceforth be the standard edition of one of the great books of the world. It is not its religious but its literary value that Dr. Klein emphasises. The hero of this volume is Richard Whitford.

Here are some errors discovered by Dr. Klein that have reappeared for many years in reference books. The D.N.B. (1900) says Whitford's can be regarded as the finest English version, but says it is founded on the translation of the first three books made by Dr. William Atkinson in 1504; and it gives the date of Whitford's as 1556, 2d ed. 1585. The latest reference book, the monumental "Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature," 4 vols. 1941, has the query date 1531 for Whitford's translation of the first three books, but states definitely that it is based on Atkinson, as does every other book I have seen.

Well, Dr. Klein points out that there were some twenty editions of Whitford's translation from about 1530 to 1585; and he proves that Whitford based his translation, not on Atkinson, but made it directly from the Latin. In establishing Whitford's place in English literature, these facts are very important. Dr. Klein says that the continuous series of English translations from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries have been based originally on Whitford, "a fact never hitherto brought forward." And again: "It is of the very greatest consequence that Whitford's . . . first appeared, not in 1556, but more than a quarter of a century earlier," because this proves his immense influence on English prose style all through the six-

teenth century, and that undoubtedly the incomparable prose of the English Bible (1611) owes much to Whitford.

Dr. Klein's long introduction is filled with freshly discovered facts and comments. He has for the Early English Text Society of London prepared a complete critical edition of Whitford's translation. His remarks on the freshness, simplicity, and charm of Whitford's style are substantiated by comparisons with other translations. There is not space here to quote adequately; Whitford loves words like "merry" and 'gl'ad." Samuel Butler (the novelist) would have liked this for he said the chief duty of a Christian was to be happy. Here is a sample comparison of Whitford's with another translation. "Such a lovver flieth high, he runneth swiftly, he is merry in God, he is free in soul." "He that loveth, flyeth, runneth and rejoiceth; he is free and cannot be held in."

We must henceforth regard Richard Whitford as one of the masters of English prose, with a great germinal influence; his English style has extraordinary charm. It is pleasant to think of this profound scholar studying in the fifteenth century as a Fellow of Queens College, Cambridge, then getting his M.A. at Paris, then serving in England as a chaplain to noble families, a close friend of Erasmus; and then leaving his high social position to reside at Syon Monastery near London, where he wrote the Translation; finally living with his intimate friends, the Mountjoys. Dr. Klein has discovered that he died not in 1555 or 1556 as often stated, but in 1542.

The Introduction has some very interesting remarks on the art of printing in the sixteenth century, with excellent reproductions of title-pages. This volume is so beautifully printed in large type that it ought to find a place in many private libraries. For those who have the impression that the "Imitation" is a purely ascetic work ought to know that its prodigious popularity is owing largely to its shrewd knowledge and interpretations of human nature. "Out of sight, out of mind," first appears there; and Dr. Johnson loved the phrase "Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be."

"Producing manuscripts for victory" is the aim of the six-weeks session of the New York Writers School, beginning next Monday, June 15, at school headquarters, 381 Fourth Avenue, New York City. Under the guidance of well-known authors, students will be turning out plays and stories, articles, and radio skits to help the war effort.

## Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

### OF TIME—AND LITERATURE

The passage of time was of great importance in the lives of the characters briefly sketched below. Do you remember them? Allowing 5 points for each one whose name you can recall, and another 5 if you can also remember the author who created him, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 9.

1. After sneaking some drinks from Hendrick Hudson and his crew, this hunter slept on a mountain side for twenty years.

2. This phlegmatic whist player wagered half his fortune that he could travel around the world in 80 days.

3. Rashly, he agreed to repay a loan within three months or sacrifice a pound of flesh to his creditor.

4. A fairy godmother made it possible for this poor girl to attend a ball but made her promise to leave the party by midnight.

5. In order to inherit seven million dollars, this young millionaire had to spend his fortune and be completely broke within one year.

6. Though he was born in 1852, this pirate-apprentice would not attain his twenty-first birthday until 1940, because he was born on February 29.

7. For sixteen lonely years this linen weaver lived in Raveloe, feared and hated by the superstitious villagers.

8. It took ten years, filled with harrowing experiences, for this soldier to return from Troy to Ithaca.

9. If the queen failed to guess this mannikin's name within three days she would have to give him her new-born child.

10. Shipwrecked on a tropical isle, this sailor was rescued after eleven years and returned home to find his wife happily married to their childhood friend.

## Blood and Thunder

A STORY TO TELL and other tales.  
By Peter Fleming. New York:  
Charles Scribner's Sons. 1942. 223  
pp. \$3.

Reviewed by RICHARD R. PLANT

THE range of these stories is the range of the world roving reporter. Whether in Guatemala's airways or a country fair in rural England, whether in a circus in Brazil or the solitude of Tibet's mountains—Peter Fleming is at home everywhere.

His plots, however, are not concerned with the changing backgrounds. They follow their own strict and violent pattern. They all have, as the author remarks so disarmingly in his foreword, the "coup de theatre" towards the end. They are written to keep the reader in suspense, to surprise, to startle and shock him. The usual modern short story confines itself mostly to atmospheric sketches and runs the risk of being a bit anemic. Fleming never runs that risk. One the contrary: he has too much blood to shed.

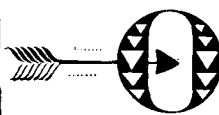
Five out of the thirteen are stories of murder. Violent action of some kind occurs in twelve. "Dina," "Mischief On Barragay," "The Face," and "The Kill" are murder stories proper. Others use the atrocities of war banditry to achieve the stunning climax.

One should expect a certain monotony in a collection of stories, all of which are tailored after a similar pattern. But nothing of the kind happens. Peter Fleming is such an accomplished virtuoso, such a shrewd exploiter of his own talents and such a superb stylist, that he manages to electrify us with each piece.

I think "Sherry" is the perfect answer to every magazine editor's prayer. It has enough good old-fashioned suspense to hold the reader, it depicts the often used background of a motion picture studio from an unusual angle, and its surprise twist is psychopathological, which satisfies the more fastidious public.

The best tale, nevertheless, is nearly a psychological one. "Tom Tom" is the story of the timid circus giant who gains self confidence through a mean and silly little crime. But since the giant is a stupid, vegetative creature with the mind of a sulky child, Fleming is not forced to do much deep soul exploring. He can present the giant's mental conflicts as translated into action. And in "Tom Tom" he does it with a brilliance and sureness that matches the early Maugham. Together with the title story and "Mischief On Barragay," it belongs in all anthologies of contemporary short stories.

# THE MAN WHO KILLED THE DEER



ONE OF THE GREATEST themes for fiction is that of hot-blooded young people coming up against the restraint of an old, conservative way of life. In **THE MAN WHO KILLED THE DEER** Frank Waters tells us about the struggle of a young Indian and his young wife to adjust themselves—between the customs of their ancient race and the new ways of the white people.

This book has a deep, abiding, and happy love story, which is timeless in its tenderness and passion. A feeling for the people. And a story of the Indian which will appeal to all who loved **LAUGHING BOY** and **LOON FEATHER**.

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By **FRANK  
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