

# The Phoenix Nest

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IN 1933 we published "Reviewing Ten Years: A Personal Record of *The Saturday Review of Literature*," chiefly written by your humble servant. It told the tale of our progress from the Ides of March in 1920 when I first met Royal J. Davis of the *New York Evening Post* (now, after many vicissitudes, the *New York Post*) and took over from him, *pro tem*, the *Book Review* of that paper. Well, grandchildren, that historic moment is now nigh on a quarter of a century ago, and I'm glad to say that the old mag is today going stronger than ever.

Now is the Twentieth Anniversary of our own Independence Day. Our first issue all-on-our-own, under the new title *The Saturday Review of Literature*, appeared on August 2, 1924. Today we have quadrupled the circulation we had then, in the days when we worked in an old converted brewery, alongside *Time* magazine! We graduated thence to 45th Street, and have only deserted it once for a short period. Today we are doing business "at the old stand," with a newly-decorated waiting-room to our office, and desk adjuncts such as Pendaflex. Jack Cominsky has even promised us office murals, though none have I yet descried. Anyway, lads and lassies, we're now well out of the red in spite of the war, and feeling younger every day that we grow older. We're proud of our past, present, and future. We're independent as that proverbial porker in his winter scene, and mean to keep so; and to hit out at anything we consider a national disgrace.

I can begin by recording that, though at least three of the old original editorial staff, Henry Seidel Canby, William Rose Benét, and Amy Loveman, remain with the magazine, since "last writing" we have experienced various changes of editorship, before shaking down to our present undefeatable task force. In September, 1936, Mr. Canby retired temporarily to concentrate upon his literary work, and he was succeeded in the chair of editor-in-chief by the dynamic and recently controversy-distinguished Benny DeVoto, the pistol-packing grammarian from Utah *via* Harvard. Benny spent a hellbent-for-heaven year and a half with us, till March, 1938. He wrote a lot, slugging it out with many a literary issue. He gave the *Review*, perhaps then dreaming too fondly of the groves of Academe, a shot of real adrenalin—till the old lady took to stomping round the office "full of strange oaths and bearded like

a pard." One of her pards, Chris Morley, made off later with the beard, when he decided to leave us. But I anticipate.

George Stevens, a charming Gentleman of the Old South, succeeded him. That ex-Nestor, then of W. W. Norton, is now the Leaping Fire of J. B. Lippincott. He had been our managing editor before entering the sanctum. But no sanctum could really hold George! He used frequently to play hookey with Noble Cathcart, to throw pop bottles at the umpire up at the Polo Grounds. However, he lasted two years, till 1940. Don't mind my flip-



—Drawings by William Rose Benét from early issues of *The Phoenix Nest*.

pancy! Both men were A-1 editors. Noble A. Cathcart, our publisher, who had stuck with us from the old days on the *Post*, finally left us to go to the Crowell Publishing Company. In May, 1938, Harrison Smith, whose former publishing firms were Cape & Smith, and then Smith & Haas, bought the *Review*; and in March, 1940, when George Stevens resigned, a new editorial board came into being, consisting of Elmer Davis (now head of the OWI, then novelist and CBS commentator), Mr. Canby, Miss Loveman, and Harrison Smith. The new executive editor was Norman Cousins, until then associated with *Current History*. It was during this new set-up that we sojourned briefly over on Madison Avenue, in a building standing on the original site of the old Day house, made famous by the stage adaptation of Clarence Day Jr.'s famous "Life with Father." In that purlieu Hal Smith was then running some four magazines abreast, poised like a circus rider on wildly cantering steeds. The offices were pigeon-hole size and dusty. We finally footed it back to 45th Street, where we are now dug in for the duration.

On the first of July, 1942, The Satur-

day Review Associates, Inc., was organized as a new company, independent of affiliation with any other publication. Stockholders were E. L. De Golyer, Henry Canby, Leonard Bacon, Rebecca Lowrie, Amy Loveman, Norman Cousins, and Harrison Smith, who was elected president of the firm. Three months later, J. R. Cominsky, for fifteen years a business and advertising executive of *The New York Times*, took over the general business direction of the *SRL*. He became our executive vice-president and treasurer, and a stockholder of The Saturday Review Associates. That was October 1; and, in the two years minus several months since then, we have sweated out every flak barrage hurled at us by subscribers overcome by our new energy; have become widely known as Cominsky's "Flying Tigers" ("They drink human blood!"); have plunged through national sensation after national sensation, in bloodcurdling controversies with representatives of the House of Morgan and the U. S. Senate; have put on weight and advertising; have become known as snappy dressers; have attained a circulation of 47,000; and have done everything else nobody expected of us, except run for Congress. Some credit, I admit, must also go to Norman Cousins, who now holds the middle-weight belt of American editorship, and has even won the decision over such veterans of debate as the Isolationists and the U. S. Post Office. Not averse to verse, Norman has always encouraged my own lucubrations, and for this reason alone, if it were not for plentiful others, I have always been found in his corner with the smelling-salts, a cold towel, and a word of advice out of the corner of my mouth. A shrewd remark from ring-wise old Benét, and the next palooka usually ploughed the canvas with his nose, in a round or two. The bigger they were, the harder I have seen them drop!

IT is all what *The Detroit Free Press* referred to along about Christmas of last year, when they said of us:

It gets so fiercely excited about things. It is the only national publication which still retains that fiery earnestness for causes and crusades in which its editors are interested.

I will say that what drew a letter of reproof from my old friend, Thomas W. Lamont, once a backer of the *SRL*—and a more square-shooting one no periodical ever had—was an innocent reference of mine to a book of Carl Dreher's published by Little, Brown of Boston, and called "The Coming Show-Down." The words, as I remember them, were Dreher's, though I thought they made sense as to the big  
(Please turn to page 72)

*The Saturday Review*

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## *In Appreciation*

In its twenty years The Saturday Review has always stood for the freedom of the press and for untrammelled literary expression. Seldom has it taken this stand more strongly than during those days when Lillian Smith's fine and honest novel **STRANGE FRUIT** was under the attack of bigotry and ignorance. We are happy to have this opportunity to offer The Saturday Review our sincerest congratulations and our gratitude.

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## AIRMAN'S ODYSSEY

# REYNAL & HITCHCOCK

(Continued from page 68)

corporations salting away considerable war profits. I still think so. But then words was fightin' words to Tom; and suddenly one day, in my summer eyrie by the Atlantic Ocean, I was astonished to see that a controversy was raging anent in the public prints. Most of the public prints' editors took the side of the eminent banker and were glad to see the poet (all poets being cuckoo) get his comeuppance. But Tom was most Chesterfieldian in his approach; so I did my best to meet him on that ground. It ended by neither of us convincing the other. But everybody had a good time. (P. S.



Now I am trying to get a good quote out of "Business as a System of Power," by Robert A. Brady, Columbia University Press. If I could only hit on the right one, perhaps I could draw Eric Johnston. In an epoch of growing monopoly-capitalism, Mr. Johnston seems to be trying to sell a sort of People's Capitalism which to my mind is somewhat of a bedtime story. I don't doubt Mr. Johnston's sincerity, and he is certainly the best President of the U. S. Chamber that we have ever had; but I see him as a sort of Jack, The Giant Killer, who still believes that the Giants are Men of Good Will. [Winsor McKay could have drawn it!] There was a wonderful photograph recently of Eric, or Little by Little, in Russia, smiling the American Business Smile of Good Will, surrounded by a group of Russian industrialists who looked—well, sort of baffled. [They say the Russians are realists.]

A project, one of many, that Norman Cousins started in 1942, and which is still being carried out by the SRL, is a cultural inventory of the United States. I don't know what more valuable thing a magazine of our type could undertake. To date, we have covered not only the Southwest (May 16, 1942), but the Deep South (to which I refer certain furious correspondents of mine who advise us Northerners to mind our own business and leave the problems of the South to the South!), the Old South (*ditto!*), New England, and California. This September we are planning to do the Ohio Valley. Our idea is to keep vitally in touch with our country, which we would exchange for no other; to find out what our regional problems

really are; to be an influence for unity and for the rational solution of the problems. What is the real State of the Nation (to borrow a title from Dos Passos)? How do its "symptoms seem to sagashuate?" What's the condition of its gray matter? We'll leave the Gallup Polls to Gallup, and trot our own way toward finding out.

Another project that has been pretty near to our heart has been that of the Anisfield Awards. You might call it an extra-curricular activity, but it's on a vital subject. The awards of \$1,000 each are given for "the best book on race relations and for the best volume in the general field of fiction, poetry, or biography, which is of such a character that it will aid in the sympathetic understanding and constructive treatment of race relations." What is more important at home today? Even our endeavor to present to you how our Government actually ticks, as illustrated by Mr. Cousins's visit to the Halls of Congress, under the ciceronage of Senator Taft, is no more important than this. In February, 1943, through the award fund established by Mrs. Edith Wolf of Cleveland, Ohio, in memory of her father, for the second time the SRL made a double award, one to "Negroes in Brazil" by Professor Donald Pierson, published by the University of Chicago Press, and one to "Dust Tracks on a Road" by Zora Neale Hurston, published by J. B. Lippincott Company. Doctor Pierson revealed an intimate and sympathetic acquaintance with the Negro elements in Brazil, and Miss Hurston's book was the personal story of a Negro woman who became a fine scholar, retaining her appreciation of human values and her sense of humor. The Phoenix Nest is proud that, in its own minor way, it has consistently fought for the recognition of the Negro in America as representing some of our finest citizens and best patriots; and will continue to fight for their right to vote throughout this country—a right long since awarded them by the Constitution of the United States and filched from them by violent, un-American elements.

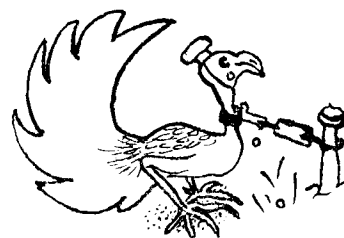
The SRL will also always fight for things being what they seem in literature, and against false pretences. It was through no personal animus, but in the interests of truth and pure literary pabulum that we lately denounced a certain book, purporting to be a treasury of exact information, as nothing of the kind. The book was a "Thesaurus of the Arts" by one Albert E. Weir, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons. Professor Paul Henry Lang of Columbia University reviewed its pretensions for us, its inaccuracies, its lack of true values, its omissions. Convinced of the meretriciousness of this publication the SRL denounced it in

a signed editorial. Thus we hope always to pillory any book that we regard as an imposition upon the reading public.

The recent article by Sinclair Lewis on Benny DeVoto's "The Literary Fallacy" was one of our efforts in the direction of an open forum on any subject of acute literary interest. A bale of comment of every color and description has been printed as a result. In this category, a new feature called "Strictly Personal," which gives many important people an opportunity to express themselves on matters they consider of national importance, has drawn some hard-hitting contributions.

Intelligent action in regard to literary censorship has, in my opinion, included Norman Cousins's controversy with the Post Office in regard to the banning in Boston of "Strange Fruit"; and his reduction of the muddle over Title V of the Soldiers Vote Act of 1944 to a matter of semantics, thereupon arranging a meeting between Senator Taft and a representative of the Army Library Service. The Army's interpretation of the Act had resulted in barring from soldiers' reading both Kitty Bowens's book on Justice Holmes and Charles Beard's history of "The Republic!"

Yes, I'm doing a little bragging. I'll go right on and brag a bit about my next-door neighbor now! In this issue you see Mrs. Kingsley's 541st Double-Croctic! The Double-Croctic is an SRL discovery. The first one appeared on March 31, 1934. The 500th, last fall, was made the occasion for a party for Mrs. Kingsley at the Coffee House, and a piece in *The New Yorker* by Philip Hamburger. In addition to doing Double-Croctics for us, Mrs. Kingsley now does one a month for *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, which is clamoring for more. She has



also done sixteen volumes of fifty Double-Croctics each, a matter which gives me a violent migraine! To her, being a best-seller is awfully old hat. This fall, I'm told, we are to start publishing a twin edition: the present volume which comes out twice a year, and a sort of Double-Croctic for the Millions, an easier edition. Each spring and fall the Hard One and the Easy One; sort of Jekyll and Hyde!

Why not be big about it, too, and throw some of the cut flowers over  
(Please turn to page 76)



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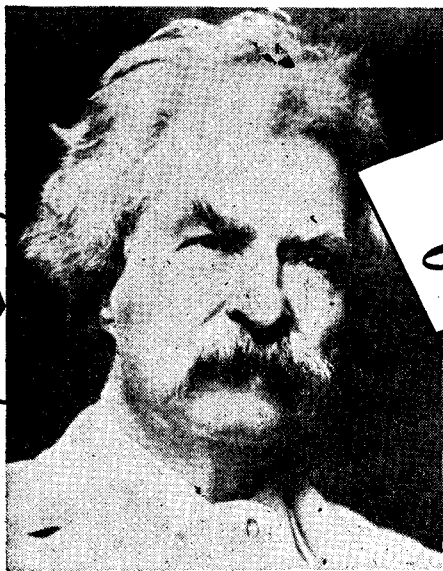
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H A R P E R      A N D      B R O T H E R S

# *to* SUMNER WELLES

## Books

in the preceding century  
fields of literary endeavor



Saturday Review *most enjoyed reading in those years*

HONEY IN THE HORN by H. L. Davis	1935	GREY EMINENCE by Aldous Huxley	1941
MAN, THE UNKNOWN by Alexis Carrel	1935	ONE MAN'S MEAT by E. B. White	1942
INSIDE EUROPE by John Gunther	1936	G. B. S., A FULL-LENGTH PORTRAIT OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW by Hesketh Pearson	1942
EYELESS IN GAZA by Aldous Huxley	1936	A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN by Betty Smith	1943
BREAD AND WINE by Ignazio Silone	1937	THE GROWTH OF AMERICAN THOUGHT by Merle Curti	1943
THE SEVEN WHO FLED by Frederic Prokosch	1937	AMERICAN HEROES AND HERO WORSHIP by Gerald W. Johnson	1943
ENDS AND MEANS by Aldous Huxley	1937	MEMOIRS OF A SUPERFLUOUS MAN by Albert Jay Nock	1943
CHILDREN OF GOD by Vardis Fisher	1939	JOURNEY IN THE DARK by Martin Flavin	1943
NATIVE SON by Richard Wright	1940	AN AMERICAN DILEMMA by Gunnar Myrdal	1944
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN by Thomas Wolfe	1940	ON LIVING IN A REVOLUTION by Julian Huxley	1944
THIS ABOVE ALL by Eric Knight	1941	THE MIRACLE OF AMERICA by André Maurois	1944
REVEILLE IN WASHINGTON by Margaret Leech	1941	THE TIME FOR DECISION by Sumner Welles	1944

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(Continued from page 72)

to Trade Winds, where that Handsome Young Man on the Publishing Trapeze, Bennett Cerf, has actually become a national institution. *Me*, could I become a National Institution—like Nabisco? I bite—not my thumbs at him—but my nails to the quick. Why, by golly, Bennett is frequently reprinted in *The Reader's Digest*—which some months ago described his column as the best in America. Unfair, unfair! I'll picket him. Why this "shakescene dressed in daw's feathers" (or however that old spite-line went from the boys in the backroom who envied Will Shakspar), this "upstart crow" (that was what was dressed in the feathers—must have been peacock's feathers—huh?) why, this prattling babe still wet behind the ears—oh, never mind. I'm just terribly, terribly hurt, that's all.

The *SRL* has always been interested in the reactions of writers and critics to the Pulitzer Awards. We have usually polled them prior to same. This year we reversed that procedure and polled them *after* the awards were made public. We think it keeps the Pulitzer judges on their toes; and they ought to be; to make these awards really mean something in America.

Departments? Our Guide to Books on Music, our Special Educational Number, our Guide to Reference Books have become fixtures; and when Mary Gould Davis joined the *SRL* staff in the Fall of 1943 she bought a treatment to the job of handling the yearly output of children's books that has won her encomia from librarians.

Writers for us in the last ten years? Well, I remember the acute criticism of Elmer Davis. I remember "Art of the Night," a coverage of reviews of "literary drama" by George Jean Nathan. Hervey Allen, on January 13, 1934, did a widely quoted piece on the sources of "Anthony Adverse." Thomas Wolfe took at least three instalments to do "Story of a Novel." Three essays, "Literature of Horror," interpreted contemporary literature in the light of psychoanalysis. You needn't think we've run out of ideas, either. What did you think of the job we did about George Bernard Shaw's 88th birthday in our issue of July 22?

We've tried to pay increasing attention to all the arts, and to take the attitude that Art is Life, is of the essence; hence what is going on in the world, as well as what is going on in books *about* the world, is of vital interest. As the Directors once remarked, "We can hardly afford to strike a pose of splendid literary isolation in an age of interdependence." Then there's poetry, too. This department will continue to go to bat for poetry at all

times, and see that as much of it is used as possible.

I'm going to end by introducing an old friend—a better man than I am, Gunga Din, and one who once conducted with me an *SRL* column. He left us some years ago to devote himself to such masterworks as "Kitty Foyle" and "Thorofare." (And you watch out now for "The Middle Kingdom," in the Harcourt, Brace catalog!)

Ladies and Gentlemen, *P. E. Q. Quercus!* (he writes from "Green Escape, L. I."):

#### ENIGMA IN THE WORDPILE

SIR: I should be sorry if your 20th anniversary issue (pronounced *issue*, not *ishue*) appeared without a wellwish word from one of your ancient collaborators. Equally sorry if you forget that the same date marks 20 years since the death of Joseph Conrad, to my taste the greatest novelist of double meanings in our lifetime. As a salutary re-

minder that a great writer may also be very weak in *syntax*, I cherish (and always use as *paradigm* in my classes) the following sentence from Conrad's "The Duel" (published also under the title "The Point of Honor"):

Fouché was trying the fit of a court suit, in which his young and accomplished fiancée had declared her wish to have his portrait painted on porcelain.

This is one of my favorite examples of Enigma in the Wordpile. There are also some honeys in that novel by young Lieutenant Pennell, "Rome Hanks," which I think of as "Gone with the Adverse."

Good luck for another twenty years. Myself, I savor the exquisite taste of silence, and shall yet become (as Henry James said of Balzac) the Benedictine of the actual.

This from mine old, beloved lord and mentor at Colyming these Many Years Agone!

## Someone Remember, After Us

By Lt. Simons Roof (JG) USNR

SOMEONE remember, after us,  
our bitter earth was sometimes sweet;  
that on a cannon-gutted crag  
our faith grew like a rose from stone,  
and in the labyrinth of dreams  
on nights that stunned with calm, we saw  
the madman in the mirror, one's  
own face, become another soul,  
the fighter's with the wounded eyes.

And if you will, remember this,  
how from the grief of dark goodbye,  
those lost on farthest fields and seas,  
we turned to light of smiles and sun,  
reread a tattered letter's peace;  
found sleep a myth, a bridge that swept  
between our earth and worlds afar,  
and over arc of shot and smoke  
sometimes would sight our guns at stars.

Remember this, our comradeship,  
the cards in fist and fist relaxed,  
the shouts at dawn, the songs at dusk,  
a glance like balm repairing pain;  
through brush, the hand that pulled us on,  
through waves, the hand that balanced life;  
until a cap afloat to West,  
a tree-caught scarf, a muddy shoe,  
like ghosts remained of proven love.  
Remember—under singing skies,

Whose sweetest song is ours unsung—  
the power of our imaged land,  
the land of yours; its glint of spires,  
its lilies stirring under snow,  
its splinter sounds of chimes, its domes  
to scale, its heritage of faith;  
remember how, when nailed by hate,  
we saw its God in a golden cloud.

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