

could not walk, it was useless for him to write.

Even the letters to David Fairchild of the Department of Agriculture are perfunctory regarding the products of the land, the mulberry eaten hot by silkworms and chilled by the King, the sheep whose monstrous fat tails were used as butter, the archaeological seeds in the shape of Bactrian coins dug up when pipe-lines were planted.

And where, to the engineer Jewett, was Bactria, whose fabulous Balkh exists today? Is there a trace of the Greeks who whipped through the land with Alexander in 300 B.C.? Is it true what that modern explorer, Prince Peter of Greece, has to say of

polyandry in Afghanistan? And where were the mountains called Hindu Kush rising from 14,000 to 25,000 feet across the author's horizon? And what, by Allah, was indicative then of Afghanistan's thrust toward its present \$450,000,000 modernization program, culturally, commercially, economically, apart from wires and tubes and milestones which few could read, each guarded by police lest the bandits steal them?

Afghanistan, spraddled crucially between Russia and India, may well become a left-handed problem child in tomorrow's community of nations. Mr. Jewett's earnest prose is scarcely helpful here, except for its frequent interjections, the colophons of Afghan scripts, "May you not be tired!"

Johnny Gunther's Gallant Battle

DEATH BE NOT PROUD. By John Gunther. New York: Harper & Bros. 1949. 261 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

IN the spring of 1946 Johnny Gunther, then aged sixteen, went back to Deerfield to school after his vacation, "sighing a little that the holiday was over but happy and full of energy and anticipation." A notification that he was in the school infirmary reached his father and mother a few weeks later, but the ailment was minor and there seemed no cause for alarm. The next day came a shattering telephone call—Johnny had a brain tumor.

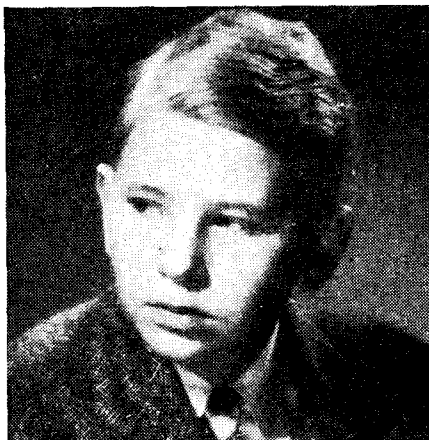
The drive through the dark that night accompanying a New York brain specialist, the faces of the consulting doctors reporting on what they had found after seeing the boy, these were but the first intimations of what the next fifteen months were to be for the stricken, courageous parents, who fought with every means to save the life of their only and brilliant child.

Mr. Gunther's book (from which, incidentally, neither publisher nor author will derive any profit, as the proceeds are to be devoted to cancer research for children) includes a brief foreword about his son, excerpts from some of Johnny's letters and diary, a concluding word about him by his mother, Frances Gunther. The chief portion of the book, however, is an account of the unavailing struggle of the parents, broken by one cruel interval of hope, the heroic fortitude of the boy himself, and of the progress of the disease and the various treatments which were tried. Knowing that the struggle must, inevitably, end in death, the parents never relaxed their efforts to keep Johnny from realizing

that they knew; and, doggedly, Johnny himself fought to spare them, as much as possible, both of his suffering and his realization of the futility of it all.

Most parents have had some of the experiences which are recounted in this book: the anxious, wingless hours in the hospital waiting room while operations are in progress, the unendurable courage of suffering children, so much harder to bear than misbehavior. To all of them, in fact to anyone, this record, set down with the vivid pen of an acute and trained observer, is hard to read; and it is much, much harder to forget. Johnny Gunther did not have very much terrible pain, except at one or two times, and his death was as merciful as possible. There were even times when he came home, could read, play chess, eat normally, and go to the theatre. But the constant tests, examinations, dressings, and treatments of those terrible fifteen months, all these he had to endure.

The reader takes away from this



—Marcus Blechman.

"Johnny Gunther made his fatal illness not a defeat but a triumph."

book, over and above the haunting picture of what child and parents endured, an enlarged sense of the stature of man, and of a very young man. Fortitude, courage, unselfishness beyond any reasonable expectation, with these weapons Johnny Gunther made his fatal illness not a defeat but a triumph. He refused to allow invalidism to turn him into a querulous, domineering tyrant. What had interested him when well—music, but most of all the world of higher science in which, even as a child, he had been at home—still mattered to him, more than pain or discomfort. He fretted not over what he had to bear physically but over what he was missing at school. He took and passed his Harvard entrance examinations. He was graduated from school (which he had not been able to attend for fourteen months) with his class, his indomitable will carrying him through the actual graduation ceremony.

"Death cannot kill what never dies" and Johnny Gunther's victory gives courage to those whose lives touch his only through the pages of this warm and heart-breaking memoir, as it must have done to his parents, to his friends, to all who watched his final, gallant battle.

Military Post Life

GAY, WILD, AND FREE, by Maggie-Owen Wadelton. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3. Mrs. Wadelton's husband was an architect who was commissioned in the First World War and "stayed in." Her book is an account of between-the-wars Army life. In the main it is unflattering, and in the main, also, it is probably not inaccurate. Her narrative is biased and acidulous, but with provocation—in the premises, not even the lilies of the field could be unbiased. Here is all the deadly protocol of existence on a military post, with only the interplay of personalities to enliven the deadliness. This book will hardly make good recruiting propaganda. I am not thinking of enlistments in the ranks—"Gay, Wild, and Free" might even stimulate those—but it will give any girl pause who is planning to marry a captain or a lieutenant who is stationed at Fort Tumbleweed or even at Fort Dix. Mrs. Wadelton, who was at several installations, identifies none of them out and out, but any old Army man, I am sure, will know which is which, and possibly who is who. This is lively Americana, concerned though it is with a highly specialized and technical phase of the national existence—but several million men and women brushed the edges of that phase not so long ago. —JOHN T. WINTERICH.

THE FINE ARTS

REALISM — MACCHIAIOLI STYLE

AT Wildenstein's in New York there is a benefit exhibition of nineteenth-century Italian painting, supplemented by Donatello's newly refurbished statue of San Ludovico. The show has been sponsored by the City of Florence, and its proceeds will be used to help restore the Santa Trinità Bridge and other Florentine monuments damaged by the war. Naturally one hopes that the profits will be large. If so, credit should go to the Donatello, since the nineteenth-century pictures must be poor box office, being little known outside their native Italy. Moreover, word has gone around New York art circles, at the normal speed in excess of sound, that the painting exhibition is a bore. I did not find it that. I found it distressing at times but not a bore, though I agree with those who claim that the choice of pictures could have been better; enough better, in fact, so that American interest in the Italian *ottocento* might have been aroused instead of lulled again to sleep, as must be the present case. Boldini, for example, appears in nearly his worst guise—flashy, flaccid, and footling. Boldini's sins were grave, but he had style and sometimes dignity.

Even so, the exhibition has moments of interest and quality. Its emphasis is on the period from 1850 to 1890, a period that achieved fabulous results in French art and launched our own major triumvirate, Homer, Eakins, and Ryder. The principal Italian movement of the era was that of the *Macchiaioli*, who gathered in the Caffè Michelangelo at Florence and propounded their esthetic theories. These theories were important for Italian painting, and in some respects were prophetic of later developments elsewhere. They are not well known in this country, and it may be useful to review some of them here.

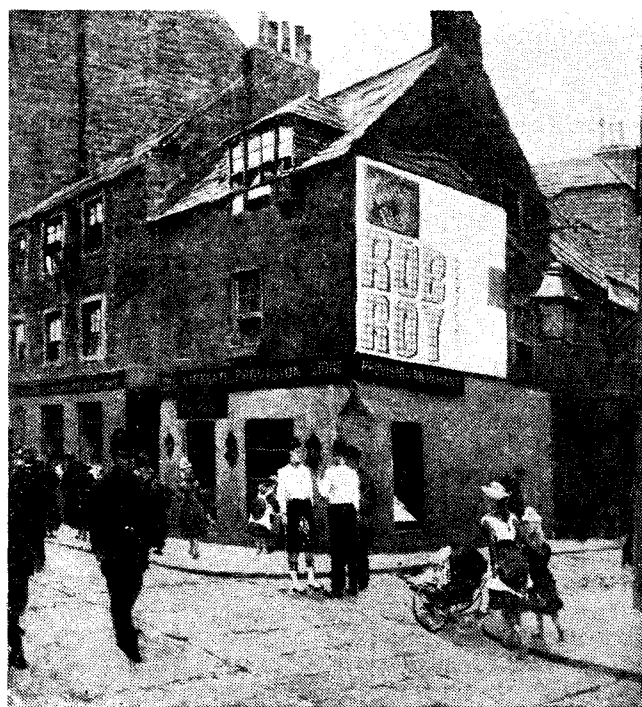
The *Macchiaioli* proclaimed that everyday reality would be the subject of their art. Like Courbet, whose doctrine of realism was evolved contemporaneously in France, they were determined to refute the tyranny of "historical" themes and to turn their backs on romanticism's dramaturgy. The *Macchiaioli* deliberately painted small pictures of scenes everyone knew (the word *macchia* means "sketch"). But unlike Courbet, they did not base their art on traditional,

realistic techniques. They painted loosely; they eschewed the use of heavy, black shadows, and relied for spatial control on shifts in tonal weight between areas of color broadly applied. In short, the *Macchiaioli* sought to convey an equivalent of reality in terms of the artist's idiosyncratic temperament; their art was subjective, and proposed a spontaneous response to the familiar in place of the later, more calculative approach of the French impressionists.

In a curious way—and perhaps this partly accounts for their eclipse—the *Macchiaioli* founded a school halfway between mid-century realism and the synthetism of the late 1880's and the 1890's. They were never as direct in their conception of reality as Courbet; they were never as boldly arbitrary as synthetism's founder, Paul Gauguin, was to become. Yet one wonders whether they should not be given greater historical credit for their part in the trend away from bald exposition toward metaphor, away, if you like, from realism toward abstraction. Certainly Giovanni Fattori's "Diego Martelli at Castiglioncello" (1867), with its flat, bright patterns of color, foretells Gauguin's earliest synthetist attempts of nearly twenty years later, while the Italian painter's little landscapes consistently remind one of Vuillard's soft-spoken art of the 1890's. The depth of Fattori's interest in the abstract potentialities of color is apparent in his picture of a white horse against a white wall: the tonal problem explored is not totally unrelated to that later reduced to its ultimate formality in Kasimir Malevich's famous "White on White" of 1918. At any rate, the *Macchiaioli's* dictum that "sentiment must be entirely represented by the technical side of expression," is right

around the corner from our own century's esthetic of pure form. It would be a mistake, of course, to labor the point of the *Macchiaioli's* precocity, but it is worth remembering that their discussions at the Caffè Michelangelo were apparently in full swing when Degas visited Florence not long after the opening of Courbet's realist pavilion at the 1855 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.

To survive in the pages of art history painters need something more than a revolutionary program, and many of the *Macchiaioli's* paintings at Wildenstein's are mediocre in quality. This, however, is often the fault of those who assembled the show. Silvestro Lega is well represented only by the charming "The Betrothed," so startlingly like the early genre scenes of Winslow Homer. And certainly there were much better pictures to be had by Giuseppe Abbati, whose passion for a mathematically determined harmony of tone and form makes him appear as the Seurat of the movement. On the other hand, I doubt that Vito D'Ancona ever painted anything much better than "The Lady in Conversation," admirable in color and with a taut expressiveness of gesture that brings Degas to mind. Degas himself greatly admired one of the best works in the current show—Telemaco Signorini's "Room in the Women's Asylum" (1865). Quite apart from its intrinsic virtues, this picture proves how completely the *Macchiaioli* had rejected neo-classicism's insistence on "good" and "beautiful" subjects; to Signorini, Fattori, and their asso-



—Courtesy Wildenstein & Co., Inc.

"Leith," by Telemaco Signorini—"... the ugly was only that which the artist had not yet made interesting."