

# THE LITERARY SAMPLER

## EXCERPTS AND JOTTINGS FROM NEW AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS

### *Not the Way I Remember It*

IF THERE HAD BEEN survivors of the Flood beyond Noah's family, they would have been tempted in their later years to correct narratives of that inundating event as reconstructed by their juniors. "That," some graybeard must have remarked, "was not the way it happened; as far as I remember it, Noah was *not* drunk. It's curious the way these legends get started." Those of us whom *Time Magazine* would call "oldsters" or, perhaps, "middle-oldsters," who were young in the 'twenties, are beginning to read books written by young men who were tots in the 'twenties, and who now with industry and imagination "get up" the 'twenties and make that decade the theme of historical fiction or, perhaps, of semi-fictional history.

One tries to remember back to the days of the speakeasy, of the Charleston, of the Lindbergh flight, of the early Hemingway, of the American (peacetime) invasion of the Riviera, to the days of speculative fever when every elevator boy was buying stock on margin in a bullish economy that could never reach a final top. One tries to recall the jazz age and flaming youth; one remembers George Gershwin and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Well, all of us who were young then remember even at that time reading about all these things. But, perversely, one seems to recall that a great deal of all this was very remote, at the time, to precisely the kind of young people who are reading about it now and believing that the more spectacular elements of the era completely characterized their predecessors. The mad 'twenties? How many of one's friends lived colorlessly sane lives! How few people some of us seem to have known who were speculating on the stock market; how relatively rare was a visit to a speakeasy! I once saw Texas Guinan plain, but that was because a visiting Frenchman insisted on going to a night club where he could see this American phenomenon. Texas Guinan gave me a rose; I wish I could regard it as the tenderest of my memories.

The life reported in "This Side of Paradise" was as frivolous and special to most young men and women of that period as it is today. A great many

of us used to read with envy about flaming youth; it never occurred to us in dormitory rooms or library cubicles that *we* were *it*. How grand it is to discover now, belatedly, that the whole generation of young people in the 'twenties was glamorously unshackled, expensively sinful, spiritually lost in far and exotic places. Most of us, even when we went to Europe, were not part of any grand and tragic international set. We lived in *pensions* where we met elderly English spinsters, and some of the worst sins we committed were on French irregular verbs. Often we had breakfast, even lunch, in dairies, not even in cafes, and for some of us, at least, spiritual enrichment came from the works of Poincare and Bergson, rather than Joyce and Lawrence.

What a pity we let the mad, bad, glad, sad, glamorous 'twenties slip through our fingers. How lucky for us that we have lived to read about them now.

—From "Under Whatever Sky," by Irwin Edman (Viking).

### *That Weekend in the Country*

AGE MAKES less difference in guests than you would think; it is "habit patterns" (as the psychologists call the

ruts of behavior) that are important to consider in dealing with guests. If, for example, you have invited what seemed to you on urban acquaintance a lively, active couple, you may as well resign yourself to their spending most of the weekend asleep. Being lively in the city is an extremely enervating business, and your couple will make up for it over the weekend. There is no use leaving the lawnmower conspicuously displayed; these are not the kind of people who are going to volunteer to push it. The chances are that they will arrive late for dinner on Friday completely equipped for tennis, golf, and swimming, and it will take the whole family to stow them and their tack in the guest room. By nine o'clock one of them will say: "Oh, this country air. I can hardly keep my eyes open." And by nine-thirty they'll both be asleep, or something, upstairs.

On Saturday morning it becomes obvious that these active urban types are country sluggards. They emerge dressed like manikins from a resort shop—the man in slacks and loafers and plaid shirt and his wife in shorts and sandals and halter—in the clothes, in other words, that people who spend much time in the country haven't time for—and they wear dark glasses. If



—From "Oops! Wrong Party!" by Hoff (Dutton).

"Et tu, Morris?"



—George Platt Lynes.



—Vincent A. Finnigan.

Russell Lynes and Robert Waithman—"which America were you to take . . . ?"

you are sensible, you have been up for a good while yourself and got the lawn mowed (your guests love to lie in bed and listen to the reassuring whirr of a lawnmower) and had your breakfast. You have made a list of the things you want to do without regard to what your friends want to do. If they feel like it they'll patter along when you go to town to shop; if they don't, they are perfectly happy sitting in reclining chairs, their faces lifted like platters to the sun. You need not worry about all the sports equipment they brought with them. That was a gesture. They won't begin to bustle until late afternoon when it is cocktail time. Then they will replace their shorts with something longer, and emerge after they have used up all the hot water, ready to use up all the gin.

The chances of what may then happen are about equally divided; they may drink so fast and furiously (they feel so full of health from a day in the sun) that they will again be ready for bed by nine-thirty. If this happens, Sunday's performance will echo Saturday's. If, however, they decide to make an evening of it, they won't appear until just before lunch on Sunday, by which time you can have had at least a half a day to yourself. The rest of the day you may as well throw away.

—From *"Guests: or How to Survive Hospitality,"* by Russell Lynes (Harper).

### *Land of Contradictions*

THE AMERICANS were childish, adolescent—people said that. Was it true that grown men, men with white hair and responsible positions in banks, even doctors and lawyers, would call themselves members of the Mystic Order of the Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm, and put on funny hats and parade with bands through

the streets? Yes, it was true, and it was just as true that the same men or their neighbors had built the Oak Ridge Atomic Energy Plants and measured at one-trillionth of a second the time required for the radio-active decay of half the atoms in the neutral meson.

A European could read something or hear something which convinced him that the Americans were people who admired strength, simplicity, and sincerity, such as Lincoln evinced; and then they would be presented with the turgid clichés of a Congressman's patriotic address—hollow, pretentious, and empty of any honest feeling. They would come to the conclusion on the basis of a song called "Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think" that the Americans must be cynical hedonists; but the next American song the band would play and the vocalist would sing would be "Daddy's Little Girl."

The glory of America, they would be told, was its social democracy which enabled the charwoman's son to attend the same school and receive the same respect as the daughter of the cabinet minister. Then it would be casually mentioned to them that Jews were kept out of some of the best American suburbs and that in some states Negroes had to sit in a special compartment at the back of the buses. Or they would read and believe that the pride of America was its fearless Free Press and Radio, which sought out and published the truth wherever it lay. Then they would have to reconcile this conviction with the information that a commentator got into trouble when he used the word spinster, so that he had henceforth to call a spinster an Ungathered Rose.

Which America were you to take, if you were sitting in a cafe in Paris or a pub in London? The America of

the wolf-whistle or the America of Mother's Day? The America that fought the Battle of the Bulge or the America that rushed from its houses in panic when Orson Welles did a radio play about an invasion from Mars?

There had never before been such resources of communication to the masses: there had never been so much information about America. But for millions of the people on the far side of an ocean it was hard to decide: it was genuinely hard.

They were not fools, the people in the free countries of Europe, and they were not for the most part envious or vicious or sly. Sometimes an American came home and said that there was anti-American feeling in this or that European country, and though he often reported it without rancor, in a scientific spirit, he was usually hurt by it.

The anti-American talk of a European could usually be traced not to a lack of facts about America but to an untidy abundance of facts. Facts were exported from America on an unprecedented scale; but they were still only some of the facts. One, or two, or four would stick in the mind of a man and he would give them weight and perhaps he would say: "Ah, the Americans—they are rich, spoiled, hard, godless people!" And he would quote his four facts to prove it. And sometimes if you told him a story that cast doubt on the validity of his four facts he would be troubled, or maybe even angry.

—From *"The Day Before Tomorrow,"* by Robert Waithman (Scribner's).

### *Prohibition New York*

IF YOU WERE a stranger in town, any policeman was usually willing to direct you to the nearest speak; if he liked your looks, he might even give you its password. You descended the basement steps of a decaying residence and rang the doorbell. You waited patiently until a light came on above the metal-reinforced door. Then a grille snapped open, and the hard eye of the lookout appraised you. If he recognized you from previous visits you were admitted without further ado. If he was a new man, and you seemed "in the know," he sent for the proprietor to pass on you. Once admitted, you might walk through a series of interlocking doors. Eventually you arrived at a bar. The Scotch was poured from bottles seemingly authentic, on which the historic labels had been artfully reproduced. So was the gin. A polite fiction had it that both were imported. In the more expensive



"The Toilet," by O. G. Rejlander [1866].



—From "Masterpieces of Victorian Photography" (Phaidon Press).  
 "Setting the Bow-Net," by T. F. Goodall [1885].

speaks, this fiction had some basis in fact. The liquors sold had originally been "imported," but their quantity was tripled by the process known as "cutting"—the addition of alcohol, water, and coloring. Beyond the bar, there was a restaurant. The fare, Italian or allegedly French, was likely to be palatable and almost certain to be costly.

It amused many New Yorkers that the city's most notable concentration of speakeasies was not far from the ugly brownstone palace occupied by Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt III. West Fifty-second Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, was notorious throughout the country. Almost without exception, every house, on both sides of the street, was a speak, and the after-dark traffic on this single block was always more congested than that on any so-called "residential" cross street in Manhattan. One of its establishments, the Twenty-one Club, known to habitués as Jack and Charlie's, was internationally famous. It represented the ultimate perfection of such institutions, the most luxurious, costly, exclusive, and fashionable of all speaks. There you saw, at dinner, stars of the stage and screen, the cream of New York's smart society, all visiting celebrities. Cocktails were priced at one dollar; champagne brought twenty-five dollars a quart; the superlative food was equally expensive. Housed in an ornate mansion, the Twenty-one Club maintained, in addition to its two bars and restaurants, a dance floor with orchestra, lounges for conversation, rooms where you could play ping-pong, backgammon, or mah-jongg. The atmosphere was one of aristocratic elegance, and you would not have surmised that this dignified resort concealed defenses as elaborate as those of a fortress, or electrically controlled devices of such remarkable ingenuity that, in the event of a raid, strategic sections of wall could be made to turn and disappear.

—From "Incredible New York," by Lloyd Morris (Random House).

### *Tomes in the Woodshed*

ONE DAY, in response to a note, I called at a broken-down Southern mansion near Charlottesville, Virginia. The lady of the house welcomed me at the door. "Before I come in," I said, "I want to tell you that I'm fed up with you Southern ladies."

"What's the matter with us, Mr. Everitt?"

"It doesn't matter what book I try to buy below the Mason and Dixon's line, it always belonged to Grandpappy and isn't for sale."

"You won't have that trouble here,"



she said. "You can buy anything in the house."

I went into a large library, which was almost entirely filled with junk. The only exceptions were the lady's husband, who was sitting in the corner, and three volumes of Ben Franklin's newspapers, sitting on the floor. She said, "Mr. Everitt, what are you going to give me for those?"

"One hundred fifty for these," I said. "Oh, is that all?"

I turned to her husband. "Listen to the woman," I said. "She knew I was going to offer her three dollars, so when I offer her a hundred and fifty, which is halfway honest, she says 'Is that all?'"

"Mr. Everitt," he said, "you could have bought those for two dollars."

"Now," I said, "I am going out in the woodshed."

"You can't do that," she told me. "It's getting dark."

I repeated that I was going into the woodshed to see what she had thrown away. After some argument she got me a lantern.

"Don't worry," I said. "I've been in a lot dirtier places than your woodshed looking for books."

In a wood-basket, ready to start the next morning's fire, was this file of *The Valley Tan* [a weekly newspaper], the only approximately complete one yet traced. I went back into the house. "Now," I told the lady, "I'm going to rob you. If these had been in the library, I'd have given you fifty dollars for them. Because you were going to burn them up in the morning, I'm going to give you ten."

"Don't you think you're being pretty cruel?"

"I think it serves you right," her husband put in.

—From *"The Adventures of a Treasure Hunter,"* by Charles P. Everitt (Little, Brown).

## Japanese Womanhood

TALKING to Professor Ottawba was a game of wits. His favorite trick was to lead you up the garden path with a mild half-sleepy question, then pounce on your answer with fiendish glee. I should have realized this was his intention when he remarked one day that he was confused, very confused. No matter how much Americans disliked Japanese men they always eulogized Japanese women. How so?

"They're gentle, sweet, feminine. They wait on us with loving smiles. They're decorative . . . A hundred reasons, Professor."

"Quite so," purred the professor, "but these admirable traits were acquired through centuries of what the West chooses to call 'slavery.' Is it not contradictory to change a system that produces such fine specimens of womanhood?"

His question was pure rhetoric.

"Besides, our women are not slaves. Look here in my own household. Are not my daughters useless as flowers; my own mother . . .?" He examined the inside of his tea cup glumly. "Only an idiot could call my mother a slave."

In the Ottawba household, the professor's mother was definitely the voice of authority. She never raised

her low sweet voice. She didn't have to. She'd arrived. After years of kowtowing to the males in her family, she'd reached the goal of every Japanese woman. Old age. She was an Obasan (the Japanese equivalent of grandmother). She had a son to revere her, a daughter-in-law to wait on her hand and foot, and two granddaughters to spoil. True, she kept up the amenities of subservience, the deep floor bows, whenever her son appeared. But this was mere lip service. She was the most intelligent of despots. She ruled without a rod or a crown.

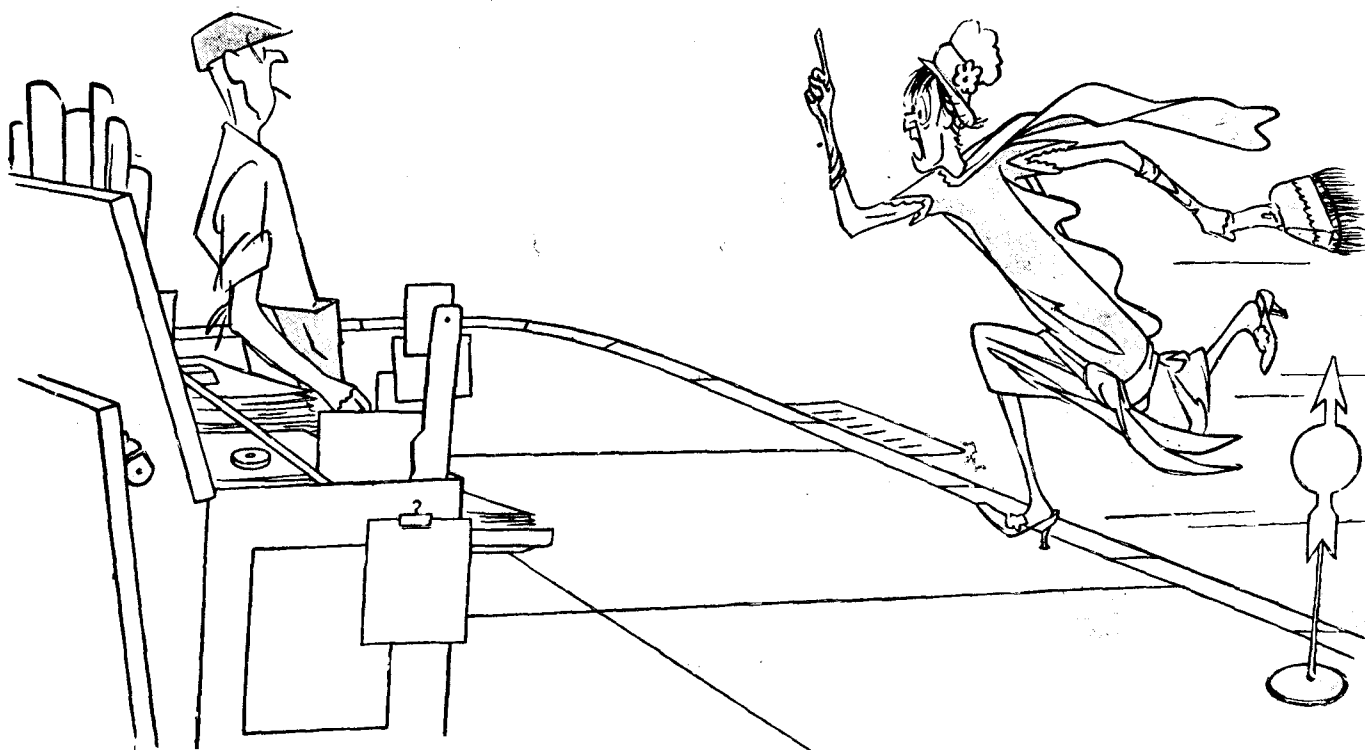
She sat in the sun now—a tiny walnut-faced old woman with cropped hair and shaved eyebrows—blinking her eyes sleepily as her son went from Japanese womanhood to the secret of Korean pottery.

"Isn't that so, Obasan?" he asked.

Obasan said how ignorant she was. This was one of the regular remarks she made at regular intervals. Then she opened her eyes as if suddenly recalled from a trance, and corrected her son on two fine points.

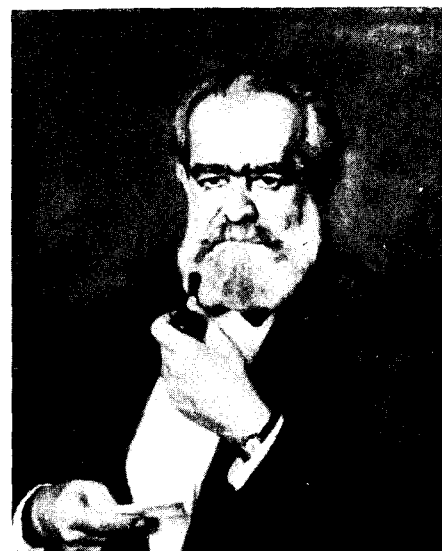
With her daughter-in-law, the professor's wife, she was less benevolent. The young Mrs. Ottawba, a woman of forty, was too well bred to show signs of the friction that went on between them. I do remember once she came to me, eyes red from weeping, and asked what Americans did about mothers-in-law. Then quickly she apologized for asking such a personal question.

—From *"Over a Bamboo Fence,"* by Margery Finn Brown (Morrow).



"Vogue! And hurry!"

**Personal History.** *When in the future some intrepid fellow undertakes to write a definitive history of the American arts in mid-twentieth century he is certain to say a good deal about Jo Davidson, our foremost portrait sculptor, and Lawrence Langner, the patent attorney who is one of the chief directors of the Theatre Guild's destinies. To instruct the historian of the future, as well as to entertain and inform their contemporaries this Christmastide, both of these gentlemen have published fine autobiographies, which we review below. . . . Female spies are possibly as deadly and certainly more fascinating than the male. Absorbing life stories of two score and ten operators are reported by Kurt Singer in "The World's Thirty Greatest Women Spies" (page 24), while Elizabeth Bentley writes about the experiences she had when she spied for Stalin in "Out of Bondage" (page 58).*



Jo Davidson—"lover of diversity."

## Plastic Historian of an Age

**BETWEEN SITTINGS:** *An Informal Autobiography of Jo Davidson.* New York: Dial Press. 369 pp. \$5.

By VAN WYCK BROOKS

IT IS recorded that Balzac, in conversation with a friend, after discussing a common acquaintance, said, "Let's get on to the real people. Let's talk about Eugénie Grandet." To Balzac this imaginary character possessed more actuality than any of the men and women he saw in the street, for that was the day when novelists like Anthony Trollope "cried at the grief" of their characters and "enjoyed their joy." That was also the day of the great portrait painters, when Ingres was still living and Lawrence was not long dead, when competent successors of Gilbert Stuart were affirming in this country that character was absorbingly interesting and wonderfully real. Besides, it was a time when writers and artists were generally characterized by traits that are regarded now with hostility and suspicion—exuberance, fertility, productivity, and the inborn vitality that many people today consider vulgar. For our comparatively dehumanized time is also a time of collectivism, in which the individual is no longer at ease, an age in which personality has ceased to flourish, and sentiment along with character has gone by the board. Above all, our time is a time of psychology, the psychology that, as E. M. Forster says, "has split and shattered

the idea of a 'person.' " What one hears on every hand is that the integrity of the individual consciousness has been broken down and so the "old-fashioned human element," as D. H. Lawrence called it, has largely disappeared in all the arts.

Now, Jo Davidson's life and work, as "Between Sittings" reminds us, triumphantly affirm that character has not vanished from the world, suggesting how practice differs from theory, which may have abolished character while in fact we deal with character all day long. When psychology has taken its place in life and people synthesize again, instead of incessantly analyzing as they do at present, art will rediscover what life has always known, for Jo Davidson's work sufficiently proves that, whatever may be thought on the subject, the "old-fashioned human element" is here to stay. One can see in the persons he has recreated nothing "split" or "shattered," and, besides, how happy the future will be that Jo Davidson did not share another mental attitude of the age of "debunking." If he has spent so much of his life reading the riddles of character, listening to people, and watching the changes in their faces it is because of a human feeling, based on a loving respect for men, that is very unlike the feeling which predominates at present. He has a "special gift for loving people," like Willa Cather's old Nebraska farmer, and he could never understand the Machiavellian contempt for men that prevails in our day of terror and of sackcloth and ashes. A disbelief in character goes with a loss of interest in it, whereas, like Walt Whitman and Thomas Paine, who longed to "raise men to their proper rank," Jo Davidson is interested in character because he reveres it. Born himself in those happier days before

the modern mind was conditioned to see only the stupidities and the sins in people, he has seen the heroic both in low life and in high life and has found the "commons" as "kingly" as he finds the mighty. But he would not be a plastic historian if he had not been especially drawn to those who have made history in our time. Where men of genius are concerned he has shared Boswell's curiosity, the flair that prompted Boswell to seek out Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hume before he set his cap at Dr. Johnson. Everyone knows the result in Jo Davidson's case. Rebecca West expressed it, reviewing one of his shows in London: "I have never read a book of criticism that so subtly and completely inventoried the mind of the age."

This, of course, has been partly due to what Rebecca West called his "lively, sensitive, well-informed intelligence." But it was largely due as well to the kind of protean imagination that led him to become the person while he was doing the portrait. Whether it was a saint or an artist, a soldier or a statesman, he always approached his subject with the innocence of a child—the child that invariably exists in the genuine artist—unmindful and even unaware of the conventional overtones that names and reputations have for other people. He found the great "irresistible," as he also found doormen and garage mechanics; he yielded to their merits "heart and soul," helplessly charmed by the human nature in them, and so great was his own magnetism that he always knew, he says, "if I got one sitting I could get another." Fortunately, in the generation in which the "global" mind appeared, when people had begun to think in planetary terms, Jo Davidson supremely possessed the planetary vision, a gift of sharing imaginatively in all the great movements of his time,

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