

one Ahbed, a ghost involved in a divorce suit between Professor and Mrs. Pincus. Taking his boss's suggestion, Greeley drives off to Woodland Cemetery, "stopping to visit only a few bartenders on the way," and finds not Ahbed, but Terry Stone, another thirsty spirit who offers to capture Ahbed for the price of a few drinks. Michael and Terry are joined by a fellow tippler, Abe Gfeen, who shares the reporter's ability to converse with ghosts, and Abe's sister Pam, who does not but manages to fascinate Michael anyway. When the foursome aren't leaning across Tom's or some other bar they're making the rounds of some of Los Angeles's lunatic cultist meetings whose vicious leaders Michael tries to expose. After encountering numerous difficulties because of Terry, his invisible friend who decides to picket Tom's Bar with placards reading, "People Drink—Why Not Spooks?," Michael finds not only Ahbed but the ghost of the recently deceased Professor Pincus who committed suicide in order to thrash the spectral Romeo who stole his wife's affections. When he's tipped off the authorities about the phony cultists and has won Pam's heart, Michael loses his power of spiritual speech in order to resume the normal life of a newspaperman.

—JOSEPH M. GRANT.

FABIA. By Olive Higgins Prouty. Houghton Mifflin. \$2.75. With "Stella Dallas" and "Now, Voyager," Mrs. Prouty proved herself an adept practitioner in the field of "women's novels," those emotion-charged stories about heroines impaled on the barbs of love. In the same pattern is "Fabia," the author's fifth novel about the Vale family, a patrician Boston clan whose saga is now carried through the Second World War.

A Back Bay debutante turned nurse, Fabia Vale writes verse and a novel and carries on a clandestine love affair in a rooming house on New York's unfashionable West Side. Duty-ridden by his profession and hag-ridden by a jealous wife, Dr. Oliver Baird nobly

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NEW EDITIONS

IT SEEMS to me that Morton Dauwen Zabel's "The Portable Henry James" (Viking Press, \$2.50) is just about as good a piece of work as it could be, within the spatial limits by which the editor was confined. Obviously there was no room in such a book for even one of the novels; but there was room for excellent specimens of all the other kinds of writing—save for the ill-starred plays—that engaged James's pen for fifty years: "short stories, longer tales or *nouvelles*, essays and reviews in literary criticism and biography, excerpts from his three autobiographical memoirs, one of the longest and most personal journals from his notebooks, and his letters." These specimens, too, as the editor intended, reveal to the reader James's thematic range and stylistic evolution. Mr. Zabel's introduction is judicious, his notes prefixed to the several sections are both brief and adequate, his "Chronology" of James's life is very nearly the equivalent of a concise biography, and his bibliography of books by and on Henry James is as full as anyone but an exacting student could desire.

The five tales chosen by Mr. Zabel are "Four Meetings" (1877), which shows James at his early best, writing with compassionate amusement and fine economy; "The Marriages" (1891), a tragi-comedy in which a girl obsessed by good intentions acts for the very worst; "Greville Fane" (1892), a trifle, but, as the editor says, a witty one; "The Real Thing" (1892), concerned with the mysterious relationship of Art and Life; and "A Round of Visits" (1910), one of the stories that explain why James chose expatriation. The three *nouvelles* are "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903), very famous; "The Pupil" (1891), well-known and highly praised; and "The Bench of Desolation" (1909), less known, and here, I think, overpraised. Mr. Zabel calls "The Bench of Desolation" a masterpiece, and agrees with Edmund Wilson that it is "surely one of the most beautifully written and wonderfully developed pieces in the whole range of James's work"; but in my judgment it is a tedious, implausible story, tediously told, with only a few fine touches. It is an example of James's last manner, and I confess that I find that manner—with its sadly diminished matter—

deplorable. The blight fell on James's fiction and non-fiction alike. One reads in the present collection, for example, his tortuous, lifeless account of his first meetings with George Eliot (published in 1917), and one weeps, thinking what he could have done with the subject thirty years earlier. In his last period he lost all sense of the proportion that should exist between subject and execution; he became a stranger to the "exquisite economy in composition" that he once held dear. Playing *retaliarius* to his own genius, he finally strangled it in the cunningly meshed, infinitely complicated net of his elaborated prose. But, happily for those readers whose admiration for James the First and James the Second does not extend to the Old Pretender (I bow my acknowledgment to my late friend Philip Guedalla), Mr. Zabel's admirable volume is composed largely of work done during the first two periods of the Jamesian career.

Melville B. Anderson's translation of "The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri," first published in 1921, and Jefferson Butler Fletcher's translation of the same poem have both been reissued, the first in the World's Classics series (Oxford, \$1.25), the second by Columbia University Press (\$3.50). The *Commedia* has challenged and inspired a surprising number of translators into English, and a surprising number of these have enjoyed a considerable measure of success in their undertaking. Mr. Anderson and Mr. Fletcher are both among the fortunate; but I prefer the latter's version. The first has been faithful to Dante's *terza-rima*, while the second—believing that this meter presents "prohibitive difficulties for rhyme-poor English," and arguing that the multiplication of rhymes, even when they are found, is fatiguing in English verse—has, with results pleasing to my ear, employed rhymed but unlinked tercets.

Madame de La Fayette's pioneer novel, "The Princess of Cleves," translated by Nancy Mitford, has been published by New Directions (\$1.50). And the same publisher has reprinted Ezra Pound's "ABC of Reading" (\$1.50), a little book that holds stimulating and suggestive passages, but one that is a characteristically untidy product of Pound's untidy mind.

—BEN RAY REDMAN.

Belles-Lettres. *Two American women writers, each enigmatic in her own way, are represented among books reviewed this week. The Yale University Press is trying to throw light on Gertrude Stein in two volumes published simultaneously: Donald Sutherland's attempt to write "a biography of her work" and a volume of Miss Stein's fugitive pieces (see below). Theodora Van Wagenen Ward has edited some heretofore unpublished letters that Emily Dickinson wrote her friends Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland (page 17). They explain a bit of the Amherst lady's personality; more important, they offer new instances of her skill as a poet. . . . In "The Practical Cogitator" of several years back two Americans, Charles P. Curtis, Jr., and Ferris Greenslet, assembled the richest gatherings of a lifetime of wide and varied reading. Now a Britisher, Victor Gollancz, has brought together the fruits of his reading in another admirable volume, "Man and God," reviewed on page 19.*

The Sound Keeps on Sounding

GERTRUDE STEIN: A Biography of Her Work. By Donald Sutherland. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 218 pp. \$3.75.

TWO: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother, and Other Early Portraits (1908—1912). By Gertrude Stein. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 355 pp. \$5.

By W. G. ROGERS

"**S**OUND COMING out of her had been sounding and she had been telling that sound coming out of her—a sound that was sounding the meaning of something that was existing," or so Gertrude Stein wrote about herself in "Two."

Except that it is impolitic to antagonize a reader in the very first paragraph, almost before he becomes a reader, we might have expanded that thus: "Or so Miss Stein wrote with her usual clarity." The meaning of the words is undeniably clear, after all; the phrasing is characteristic; and the passage, which dates from about 1910, is true. Sound would keep coming sounding out of her for thirty-five years more, mingled increasingly with pro and con sounds out of her admirers and detractors. It all made a hubbub and a to-do, and these two books will put no damper at all on this sound coming sounding ever loud and clear.

Sir Edward Grey said that a nation preparing for war prepares for the last one, not the next. Miss Stein quoted him. Mr. Sutherland quotes her, then claims the artist does better than the nation, for he prepares for the unexpected. It may also be claimed that the indolent reader expects of

the next book what he had in the last, though it is rather his duty, and certainly his pleasure, to expect something different. Mr. Sutherland helps prepare him for the fresh and always unexpected Gertrude Stein.

Like all other commentators, Mr. Sutherland goes back to Hugo Münsterberg and William James. He notes their, and her, concern with consciousness, and her experiments in automatic writing. One problem today is to explain how her work, which looks exasperatingly like automatic writing, isn't, but is instead "conscious and clear," "objectively clear"; however many inattentive readers it put to sleep, it was not written in a trance. Fixing her attention on "present thinking," as Mr. Sutherland calls it, she advanced to the prolonged and continuous present; to characters expressed without the help of incident, comparable to the oil painting without characters in it; to objects without characters, as in "Tender Buttons"; to "absolute and self-contained literature." It was a progression, says Mr. Sutherland, and so he writes a "biography" of her work.

He agrees with her that she was a genius, believes her lofty purpose in writing was to create masterpieces and nothing less. He defines the spirit of her art as essentially comic. He interprets the novels most helpfully, in particular the romantic "Lucy Church Amiably" and the existentialist "Ida." Furthermore, his first sentence expresses his intention of explaining only "as much as I understand" and he repeats this disavowal more than once. The Stein cause, though it is established unshakably, should thank this appraiser heartily for his modesty,

his frank admiration, his perspicacious, diligent, and loving research.

Mr. Sutherland, who is not of course the first to venture into the green field of Stein exegesis, occasionally finds himself on a path already well trodden. He is a brilliant elucidator, but his brilliance, maybe because it dazzles and blinds even him, can lead him astray, into foggy regions beyond his trail's end. It happens in Spain, for instance. Certainly the Spanish landscape, "immediate and final," exerted a fundamental influence on Picasso the cubist and the Stein of "Tender Buttons" and "Four Saints in Three Acts." But to argue also that, since Spain is a peninsula, it doesn't keep going on and on but that in fact the only distances left to it eventually are up, is to milk Spain drier than even Miss Stein and Picasso did. It resembles so much of the talk, which is muddy, about so much modern art, which is clear, and it has no evocative or creative significance or necessity. Again, when Mr. Sutherland describes Miss Stein as a "small and compact" person, he is only half right; when he calls her a "small and compact" writer as the consequence of her physique, he is not right at all. "A taller and more loosely knit person," he declares, "if he really lives his writing, will naturally write another kind of thing." That's almost the same as saying that Mr. Sutherland, who in his photograph has a mustache and a somewhat lined face, could not testify so sensitively, without mustache and wrinkles, to Miss Stein's unique virtues.

One virtue was that she wrote so that she could be understood by those who cared to understand, or so it always seemed to me. Other people think not. They might accuse Mr. Sutherland of piling a special obscurity of his own on top of hers, and thus leaving her essence twice as unavailable as before. These people especially need this book, and I hope Mr. Sutherland's apparent indifference to an audience will not alienate them. He can turn a marvelously neat phrase, and be as epigrammatic as Miss Stein herself. But he can also talk, for instance, about "multiplied delocalization"; that means, if you please, that Miss Stein didn't stay long enough in one place to put down roots, that she was in fact a rolling Stein. The day will come, I predict, when we shall have to ask her books to elucidate her elucidators. Mr. Sutherland concludes wisely: "Forget

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