

A Gifted Writer

MEMORIAL VOLUME OF AND BY
ETTIE STETTHEIMER. New York:
Alfred A. Knopf. 643 pp. \$7.50.

By BEN RAY REDMAN

MISS STETTHEIMER's memorial volume, prepared by herself with the purpose of making sure that such a volume should exist, consists of a novel, "Love Days," first published in 1923 under the pseudonym of Henrie Waste; an autobiographical fragment, "Philosophy," published in 1917 under the same name; a doctoral thesis written at the Albert-Ludwig University, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, where the author studied under the inspiring philosopher-teacher, Heinrich Rickert; and four short stories, only one of which has been published previously. These diverse works introduce their readers to an unusual personality, a vigorous mind, and a gifted writer who seems never to have been quite sure in what particular field her talents could be most successfully exercised.

The story of Susanna Moore's search for happiness is a fascinating, irritating, sometimes brilliant, sometimes baffling novel. Susanna, whose self-love is her one romantic interest that is proof against disappointment, is the most exasperating of heroines; and the several styles in which Miss Stettheimer fluently records this extraordinary beauty's cosmopolitan and amorous progress range widely from excellence to its antithesis. We are fascinated by Susanna because of her unpredictability, because we can hardly help wondering what her creator will make her do next. But we cannot accept her as anything but an elaborate literary construction, the fabrication of an author whose imagination and intelligence are not harmonious; and we find ourselves agreeing with the friend who tells her, "when you are theoretical you are a little too naive to be bearable." Miss Stettheimer herself describes "Love Days" as "the story of an intelligent woman who, weakened under continual pressure from outside sources, gave way and got herself to believe

what she wished to believe, surrendering her loyalty to herself;—how, through this act of treason she so corrupted her soul that when a chance for true fulfillment in love came to her, she no longer had the wholeness to understand the character of this love and receive it into her being." But I must confess that I cannot believe in Susanna's intelligence, or that she was the victim of outside forces, or that she was offered a final chance of fulfillment.

The doctoral thesis—a closely argued condemnation of William James's "voluntarism" or anti-intellectualism, written under the immediate influences of Rickert and Dickinson S. Miller—will convince any attentive reader that Miss Stettheimer was, in 1917, an exceptionally intelligent young woman; but it will hardly be chosen for attentive reading by any but students, or amateurs, of philosophy. As for the short stories, three of them are more or less amusing trifles, while the one that is not a trifle is not, in my judgment, wholly successful. Most readers will, I think, be best pleased by the "autobiographical fragment" which describes—with, perhaps, some fictional additions—the author's own experiences at the Albert-Ludwig University. Here we find Miss Stettheimer's writing at its best. The heroine of this narrative aspired to nothing less than a state of knowledge in which "every act" would "call up upon demand an illumined outline of ultimate purpose," and in which one would "know what one might desire and why, and thus be master of oneself to the extent of living without hesitations and doubts . . ." To that end she makes love wait upon learning. We may think that her worship of and faith in philosophy were perhaps excessive—even, in the final analysis, romantic—but the heroine commands complete belief, warm respect, and even affection.

The author of this handsome memorial volume looks on its miscellaneous contents—with the exception of the short stories—as a variously phrased defense of reason, a counter-attack upon the anti-intellectualism of our times. Whether "Love Days" will bear the weight of this interpretation is questionable; but "Philosophy" and "The Will to Believe" assuredly will.

Miss Stettheimer must find satisfaction in surveying her collection. Yet I cannot help wondering—and I wonder if she wonders, or knows—what it was that prevented so gifted and so actively intelligent a woman from achieving even more complete fulfillment as a writer.

Wisdom for Crises

UNDERSTANDING FEAR IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS. By Bonaro W. Overstreet. New York: Harper & Bros. 242 pp. \$3.

By STUART CHASE

HARRY OVERSTREET and his wife Bonaro are close students of the new sciences dealing with man. He has recently written a wise and popular book about the mature mind, and she has now produced a companion analysis about understanding fear. It is a wise book, too, and deserves to be very popular.

Mrs. Overstreet tells of a deer grazing at the edge of their hayfield in Vermont. Suddenly it pricks up its ears, sniffs, and bounds over a stone wall, deep into the woods. The deer was afraid of something, probably with excellent reason. This kind of fear is a necessary part of its survival mechanism.

Human beings need this mechanism too; indeed, without it we should long since be extinct. But in addition we have piled up a host of *phantom* fears, which not only make life far more miserable than it needs to be, but often work in reverse to create danger. In such a scare-engendered proposal as a "preventive war" human fears may even threaten survival itself. No deer of course would be so foolish.

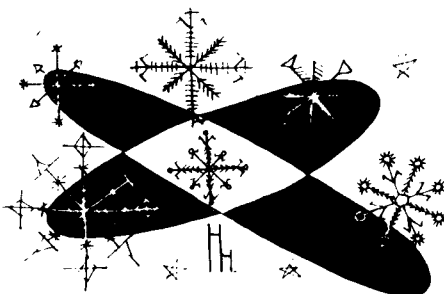
Mrs. Overstreet addresses herself primarily to the phantoms: what are the varieties, how did these fears arise, how can they be exorcised? Nothing could be more timely.

If, today, we live in a time of crisis, it is in large measure because the fear-born follies of our individual and group pasts have piled up in the present. Errors of omission and commission crowd us now, demanding a swift new wisdom about destructive fears and the conditions that foster them.

The first half of the book outlines the problem; the rest concentrates on what we can do about it. Theory is supported by many specific cases, some of them dramatic. The treatment and admirably clear style are for the intelligent layman, but social scientists, too, will find no doubt the book stimulating.

Fear is a complicated phenomenon. The semanticist in discussing it would
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Stuart Chase's books include "The Proper Study of Mankind" and "Roads to Agreement."



Belles-Lettres. *With the twentieth century already well into its third quarter, it is scarcely surprising that literary historians and critics are busy charting its trends and weighing its values. Thus far most of the stock-taking appears to be of Americans by Americans. A month ago Van Wyck Brooks concluded his monumental history of American writing with a chronicle and a credo of his own times in "The Confident Years" (see page 11). Another writer who questions the value of T. S. Eliot's influence on contemporary literature is Rossell Hope Robbins, author of "The T. S. Eliot Myth" (page 19). Two works by Frederick J. Hoffman and Harold C. Gardiner, reviewed on page 20, appraise the novel, while Louise Bogan has undertaken to sum up "Achievement in American Poetry" in the slim volume discussed on page 21. . . . André Gide's "My Theater" (below) reveals a side of the French writer little known in this country.*



André Gide—"être de dialogue."

Intellectual Drama

MY THEATER. By André Gide. Translated by Jackson Mathews. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 275 pp. \$4.

By HENRI PEYRE

ALL GREAT French novelists of the last century—Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola—were attracted by the stage. So were most fiction writers of the present age, with the exception of Proust and Malraux.

The plays of André Gide never reached more than a limited audience of sophisticated amateurs. But they make excellent reading. They embody some of the finest merits of his prose, terse, restrained, subtle, and they express the most valuable message of that perpetual "être de dialogue," now moralist, now esthetician, now bent upon disturbing. In the rich history of the "Théâtre en Liberté," parallel to the legitimate stage and often superior to it, which tempted Hugo, the coiner of the phrase, Browning, Hardy, and Yeats among others, Gide holds an eminent rank.

A suggestive essay on "The Evolution of the Theater," first delivered

as a lecture in Brussels in 1904, is appended to this volume. Another equally fine lecture on the importance of the public, given in Weimar the preceding year, should have been included also. The two essays provide an esthetic of a literary theatre, adverse to realism, fascinated by the classical unities, instilling a novel and often heretic significance into classical myths and Biblical themes, which has since won great acclaim. Such a drama leans heavily on ideas and too little on imagination or on will-power impelling the characters to action. It is dangerously complex, somewhat static and slow-moving, even when, as is the case with Gide, the dialogue is conducted with masterly skill. But the admirer of Goethe and the apostle of the devil did not heed Faust's writing: In the beginning was action.

"Oedipus," the driest of Gide's dramatic attempts, and "The Caves of the Vatican," with which he reached the French public on the eve of his death, have been omitted from this volume. "Persephone" and "Bathsheba" are lifeless creations too harmoniously overwritten. "Philoctetes," on the contrary, inspired by Sophocles and Fénelon and once brilliantly commented on in this country by Edmund Wilson, dramatizes a moral debate about "the wound and the bow" and the search for a definition of virtue, or rather of virtues. As intellectual drama splendidly written, blending irony and fervor, it is almost the equal of Gide's masterpiece, as yet regrettably untranslated into English, "The Return of the Prodigal Son."

"King Candaules" and "Saul" alone can claim to be true dramas. The first was acted before German-speaking audiences, but with scant success: it

reminded them too much of Hebbel's "Gyges" and of too transparent Nietzschean teaching. The king insists upon showing his beautiful wife undressing to the fisherman Gyges, for he considers it to be robbing others to enjoy his happiness alone. But the queen, incensed, because she wants jealousy in the love that she inspires, drives Gyges to murder her royal husband. Political implications can be read in the king's betrayal of the privileges of his rank through wanting to share them.

"Saul" is richer in symbols and one of the most revealing works of Gide. It is the picture of the progressive disintegration of a soul. The Jewish king, disturbed and weak, unable to resist the call of the demons, is fascinated by the handsome young David who just triumphed over Goliath. He distrusts his wife and his feeble son, Jonathan. Vainly does the witch of Endor warn him against the faltering of his soul and against his imprudence in taking to heart what hurts him. "All that delights you is your enemy," she tells him in a typical Gidian saying. But Saul persists in annihilating his personality and unnerving his will. He fondly makes himself believe that his value lies in his complexity. Amid moods of poetical self-pity reminiscent of Shakespeare's sweet-tongued Richard II Saul perishes, "qualis artifex!" There are flashes of Shakespearean beauty in the drama, and dark recesses half-disguised by the clear purity of the outline. "Saul" and "Philoctetes" deserved to be made accessible in English, and Jackson Mathews has rendered them expertly.

Henri Peyre, professor of French at Yale University, is the author of "Writers and Their Critics," and other volumes.

Thieving Time

By M. A. DeWolfe Howe

NOW, thieving Time, take what you must—

Quickness to hear, to move, to see;
When dust is drawing near to dust
Such diminutions needs must be.

Yet leave, O leave exempt from
plunder
My curiosity, my wonder!