



The Warrior Tongue

LITERARY AMERICA. By David E. Scherman and Rosemarie Redlich. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 176 pp. \$5.

LITERARY BRITAIN. Photographed by Bill Brandt. New York: British Book Centre. 212 pp. \$10.

By ANTHONY RICHARDSON

THESE two books are completely independent of each other, alike in conception and in execution. (The Scherman-Redlich team already has a "Literary England" to its credit, but "Literary Britain" is another affair altogether.) "Literary America" is subtitled "A Chronicle of American Writers from 1607 to 1952 with 170 photographs of the American Scene that Inspired Them," and the description is accurate. Each author is discussed in an illuminating text-panel, and captions are usually complemented by direct quotation from the author himself. You get, then, not only surpassingly fine pictures, but pertinent samplings of literary wares, plus short, biographical-expository-critical thumbnailings of the authors which assume that the reader knows the difference, alike in time and theme, between William Bradford and William Faulkner. Ninety-two authors are represented, from Captain John Smith (ruins of Jamestown Church) to Eudora Welty (ruins of the Natchez Trace). Panels, quotes, and photographs are so deftly assembled that the leafer-through quickly becomes a reader, and the few minutes he intended to give the collection can easily run into hours. Here is full value and noble entertainment, plus a painless, non-patronizing refresher course in American letters.

David Scherman and Rosemarie Redlich spent two years taking pic-

tures and gathering copy for "Literary America," but the British Isles are tidier and tinier, and Bill Brandt was able to get together pictures and text for "Literary Britain" in a single year. He did a superb job. His arrangement is alphabetical by authors (the Scherman-Redlich scheme is chronological), and Shaw thereby comes immediately after Shakespeare (which Shaw would not approve), and Swift is sandwiched between Stevenson and Swinburne. But if this be a minor irritant (and there is no reason in the world why it should be), the pictures more than make up for it. They are full page, bled on all outer edges, and framelessness lends them a striking sense of actuality and expanse. They represent, chiefly, buildings, but let it not be assumed that these are mere architectural studies. Nothing could be more impressive than the grace of Cheyne Row, the spaciousness of Hughenden Hall, or the stark angularity of Bur- slem Town Hall.

This comment may reasonably include a not inapposite incident which Leo Solomon relates in his recent "There's Money in Pictures" (Funk & Wagnalls, \$3), a lucid, sensible, and eminently practical manual for the amateur photographer who wants to know all about the picture market. Some years ago a New York picture agency asked its London office for a photograph of Tennyson's brook—the one that was supposed to go on forever. Nothing happened. New York queried again. So sorry, came the answer. The brook had dried up.

"Literary America" and "Literary Britain" are perfect table books. But they will not stay on the table—somebody will always be picking one of them up and yielding to its lookability, its readability, and its durable charm.

Springfield Solitary

CITY OF DISCONTENT. By Mark Harris. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 403 pp. \$4.50.

By PAUL ENGLE

IN A foreword of his "Collected Poems" Vachel Lindsay remarked that he was told "on every hand I must quit being an artist, or beg. So I said, for the third time, 'I will beg.'"

That is the sort of man with whom this new biography deals. In a time when the solid word "security" is a slogan by which we live, it is astonishing and heartening to find a poet who says quite calmly, and for the third time, "I will beg." There is a quality in this book which shames us; we all compromise now and then in the little things, but Lindsay was a man who never compromised, big or little. Rather than twist his talent an inch from the way he felt it had to go, he begged. In the last year of his life, rather than do anything other than what he thought it was his destiny to do—write poetry and sing it—he ignored the unpaid bill when the electricity was turned off and read by candlelight.

Mark Harris has not simply put down the facts of Vachel Lindsay's life, or accounted for the poetry. He has tried to reconstruct out of his own imagination actual scenes with their dialogue and action. In addition, he has provided a good deal of background from the years of his childhood, youth, and maturity. Often this is very well done, with a ring of rightness in the situation which wholly justifies the fabrication. There is a fine description of Bryan's visit to Springfield when the powerful, gold voice from the Platte shouted "The people have a right to make their own mistakes," and the sixteen-year-old Lindsay heard it and later, in a natural way we have almost lost, put the words of a politician into a poem. He put himself in, too, for he had gone with his best girl and in the poem confessed his awkwardness: "With my necktie by my ear, I was stepping on my dear."

Here, too, is the pathetic story of a man more devoted to his hometown (Springfield, Ill.), in all probability, than any poet in this country has ever been, and yet, save for a handful of people who literally gave him

Paul Engle, professor of English at the University of Iowa, is the author of a number of volumes of verse, including "West of Midnight" and "The Word of Love."

their hand, either ignored or openly disliked in it. Who can tell what the effect on Lindsay might have been in terms of hope and health and even the refusal to take his own life, had he felt himself wanted and liked. For he was a prophetic person whose vision of a blessed city was not located in any remote paradise, but in the middle of a midwestern state everyone knew too well.

Some known facts of Lindsay's life are curiously omitted (why not relate his trip to Glacier Park with Stephen Graham?), there is a notable lack of personal records such as letters and diaries (no doubt unavailable because of prior use by Edgar Lee Masters in his earlier life of Lindsay), and a glossing over of certain of the grimmer implications of his private life and of the thinness of some of the poems. But these reservations do not keep the book from being an exceptionally skilful and sympathetic reconstruction of a poet's tangled years. Mr. Harris laments the shabby way in which this country often treated a poet so deeply devoted to it, so determined to celebrate its landscapes, its people, its past. But he also candidly recounts ways in which Lindsay was undeniably a difficult person, one who could easily

appear, to many who knew him slightly, a plain fool.

There is little attempt at a rigorous analysis of the poetry, Mr. Harris preferring to stick to the man himself rather than his work. There is also a lack of revelation in the account of the final day ending in suicide. Yet reading back through the book one can say that the author has visualized all of Lindsay's life as leading inexorably to that last almost melodramatic act of drinking the poison. Here is one of the desperate moments of American history: in the house where he had been born, where he had crawled as a baby on the floor, a shattered poet, his belly burning with the fatal liquid, crawls up the stairway on his hands and knees. This was in that city of which he had written, "Let every street be made a reverent aisle." And we are shamed by this, too.

We are not chanters and visionaries today, and it may be that for the moment there is no other way, but it is excellent to have this book to jolt us into realizing again that it is proper for a poet to write about Kalamazoo, a broncho, the buffalo, a governor, a calliope. We praise Mr. Harris for the fluent shrewdness with which he has praised Vachel Lindsay.



Vachel Lindsay and his wife—soon "burning with the fatal liquid."

—Culver Service.

Me-Too!

PLAGIARISM AND ORIGINALITY.

By Alexander Lindey. New York: Harper & Bros. 366 pp. \$5.

By HENRY C. WOLFE

IF YOU write or expect to—and who doesn't?—here is your Pandora's box. It is crammed full and brimming over with good things—the tops in legal guidance, tales of art's great and would be's, more fun than a barrel of copyrights. In the bargain, Alexander Lindey, authority in the law of literary property, demonstrates his theory of originality by being as original as all get out.

Disillusioning as the truth may seem at first, "all creative people borrow." Charles Lamb called it "honest stealing." In what amounts to a capsule survey of literature and art, Mr. Lindey brilliantly cites chapter and verse to show that genius is original, but does not originate. Who is your idol—Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Goethe, Brahms, Victor Herbert? In the difference between what he took and what he gave lies the margin of the creative imagination. His is the high realm of art, not the mean terrain of plagiarism.

To Wilson Mizner is attributed the cynical quip: "If you steal from one author, it's plagiarism; if you steal from many, it's research." There are laws, as Mr. Lindey points out in illuminating and diverting detail, to protect that one author from the plagiarist. Nevertheless, the latter can and often does make it troublesome and costly for the author to defend his rights. Belasco, the most-sued man in the history of plagiarism, spent thirty years defending suits. Between 1920 and 1930, more than a third of the successful Broadway playwrights had to fight suits. "Nobody," Mr. Lindey observes, "ever gets sued on a novel that winds up on the remainder counters or on a play that folds in three days or on a movie that doesn't click." And the catch is that, although the author wins his case, the plagiarism-crier may be bankrupt.

There is no page of "Plagiarism and Originality" where you cannot put in a thumb and pull out a plum of practical legal advice, crisply told anecdote, or delightful humor. Sculptors, composers, cartoonists, scenarists, fashion designers, radio scripters all have their day in erudite Judge Lindey's wonderful court. The classic gagmen are out in force, from Aristophanes to Fred Allen, with a popular
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