

Yesterday's Jimjams

THE AMERICAN TWENTIES: A Literary Panorama. Edited by John K. Hutchens. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 480 pp. \$5.

By MILTON CRANE

“THAT mordant, light-hearted, serious-minded, complex, and seminal time,” John K. Hutchens calls the Twenties, the subject of his excellent new anthology. As one who, during that time, was chiefly occupied with grammar school, I have been mildly amazed in recent years to observe the curious succession of epithets used to characterize this period. Time was when the Twenties were “the jazz age,” “the era of wonderful nonsense,” worthy equally of contempt and amusement; later one began to hear of “the roaring Twenties,” a lusty but admirable age; now they seem to have settled down as “the golden Twenties,” needing only the horse-car and the gas-lamp to become indistinguishable from the great days of Clarence Day, Sr. It took the Second World War to make us nostalgic for the years of Al Capone and the Scopes trial. No doubt the first words ever spoken or written were a lament for the Good Old Days.

Whatever the social historian may say of the Twenties, the literary historian must agree with Mr. Hutchens that the fame of this era is secure. Many of the writers turned away from the political and economic problems of their America to address themselves before all to achieving the mastery of their art, sometimes with conspicuous haughtiness and disdain, as in George Jean Nathan's “Code of a Critic,” sometimes with the unobtrusive brilliance of an Ellen Glasgow. They plunged with enthusiasm into the bracing water they called disillusion; and their sense of the futility of life did not keep them from enjoying it to the full. Their artistic seriousness has left us, *inter alia*, “The Great Gatsby,” “The Sun Also Rises,” most of Ring Lardner's short stories, and much of the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore. By comparison the Thirties are meager and the Forties unformed.

Mr. Hutchens, quite rightly despairing of capturing the essence of so complex and many-sided an age, has assembled a collection of the best

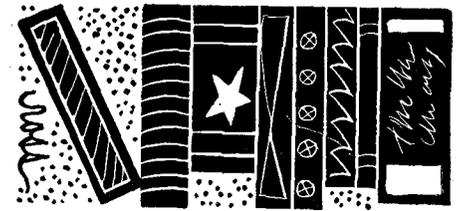
and most representative writings of the Twenties. His categories are entitled “Short Stories,” “Poetry,” “Excerpts from Novels,” “A Play” (“The Emperor Jones”), “More or Less Literary,” “Light Verse,” and “Lives and Times.” Novels are notoriously difficult to excerpt, but at least one of Mr. Hutchens's selections is a fine stroke: the collected chapter-headings of John Dos Passos's “Manhattan Transfer.” The short stories include excellent samples of Lardner, Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and others, and an evocative early story by James Thurber that has until now remained buried in *The New Yorker's* files.

In the “More or Less Literary” division, Mr. Hutchens appears as the informal literary chronicler, a role familiar to readers of his Sunday page in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Here is Frances Newman's scathing review of “This Side of Paradise,” with Fitzgerald's angry reply, and comments on both by Miss Newman and James Branch Cabell. Ernest Boyd's delightful “Aesthete: Model 1924,” from the first issue of *The American Mercury*, is followed by Burton Rascoe's eminently sensible remarks on it. The whole uproar, as Mr. Hutchens says, is less interesting in itself than as an indication of how widespread was the popular concern with literature. Two drama reviews by Alexander Woollcott, both written in his sharpest and cleanest prose, remind us of how good a critic was lost when he turned *Town Crier*.

If there is one section that Mr. Hutchens might with profit have expanded, it is the catchall “Lives and Times.” What he has reprinted is first rate, but the age was particularly rich in this kind of superior journalism: FPA's “Diary of Our Own Samuel Pepys,” Mencken on a backwoods religious revival and his tremendous blast against the farmer, the *New York* reporters belaboring each other on the right way to interview Joseph Conrad, Dreiser's loving memoir of his brother, Broun on Sacco and Vanzetti, and others. These pieces bring back the Twenties with a vengeance, not perhaps as a time in which some admirable writers were doing their best work, but as a time in which people lived (and, incidentally, wrote), a time which, as Frederick Lewis Allen said in his foreword to the reprint edition of “Only Yesterday,” was not really madder than most.

For, after the tumult and the shouting and the inevitable references to Coué, the Twenties were, in Mr. Hutchens's words, “both a more hospitable and a more tolerant literary time than the present.”

Milton Crane, editor of “The Roosevelt Era,” is on leave of absence from the University of Chicago's English department.



Treacherous Titan

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST: A Portrait in His Own Words. Edited by Edmond D. Coblenz. New York: Simon & Schuster. 309 pp. \$3.50.

THE LIFE AND GOOD TIMES OF WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST. By John Tebbel. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 386 pp. \$4.

By FRANK LUTHER MOTT

THESE are interesting books, if you are at all curious about William Randolph Hearst and what made him TICK.

You ought to be curious about William Randolph Hearst, because he was a powerful newspaper publisher.

The first of these two books is composed of Hearst's own writings.

Most of these writings are in what Hearst called “paragraphic”—that is, single-sentence paragraphs.

And short sentences, at that.

Like this.

Enough of “paragraphic,” which is apt to be tiresome. Incidentally, it seems to suit humorous narrative better than any other type of writing, and Hearst used it very well in the anecdotes and stories he liked to tell in his newspaper column.

Edmond Coblenz was closely associated with Hearst for half a century, having been for some years a kind of general supervising editor of all the Hearst papers. It occurred to him that he could put together some of the letters he had received from the man he delighted to call “the Chief,” certain pieces Hearst had written about his boyhood and youth in his column “In the News,” and excerpts from other letters and papers, in such a manner as to produce an informal autobiography and character profile of one of the outstanding journalistic figures of our generation. This he has done with restraint and good judgment.

Mr. Coblenz refrains, for the most part, from evaluation and appraisal; yet this is, of course, a friendly por-

Frank Luther Mott, dean emeritus of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, is the author of a forthcoming book. “The News in America.”

trait. Marion Davies is not mentioned, nor are the personal extravagances of the publisher, nor the assorted sins and failings which furnish out so many of the pages in the biographies written by Lundberg and by Carlson and Bates. But though sketchy and incomplete, this portrait is illuminating. The keynote of it, in more than one respect, is the quotation from Hearst which is placed at the head of the foreword: "Perhaps the public prefers to consider me as an 'austere' person—which God forbid that I should be—instead of the 'human' person I earnestly strive to be." Thus the emphasis in this book is on the personal qualities of Hearst, though there are several chapters on his political and economic opinions, chiefly devoted to his relations to men like Hoover, Roosevelt, Landon, Willkie, and so on.

In the column which Hearst wrote for some years after the death of Brisbane had deprived the papers of the feature "Today," in which the commonplace had long masqueraded as the profound, the Chief displayed the wit and sentiment which seemed to characterize the human being that he earnestly strove to be. He broke into verse about pets that had perished, or he told tales about "Little Willie"—nostalgic sketches of his own childhood and youth.

"Little Willie" was visiting, with his parents, at a fine home on Nob Hill, and had "a lovely, sumptuously furnished corner room all to himself"; so, on April 1, he got a lot of fireworks together and set them off in his room, yelled "Fire!" and locked the door, and then watched with glee as the

firemen came to rescue him and the house. On another occasion "Little Willie" threw a cobblestone through the window of a dancing school which he had attended unwillingly. But the finest time "Little Willie" had was in Paris, when he and a companion perpetrated a number of jokes which demoralized a pension and (when they were put out of there) a hotel in which they took refuge. This demoralization was accomplished chiefly by use of toy cannon, gunpowder, inflammable alcohol, and fireworks. The story is almost as incredible as a picture series of the devilments of the Katzenjammer Kids. Which reminds us that it was Hearst who suggested the Katzenjammer Kids as the subject of the first regular comic strip published in any newspaper. We are also reminded that it was ill-judged fireworks that got young Hearst into his first difficulties at Harvard, and that ill-managed fireworks in Madison Square during one of his campaigns for election to Congress resulted in seventeen casualties. Is there not a connection between Katzenjammer tricks, pyromania, and yellow journalism?

An excellent chapter in this book is one entitled "Newspaper Publishing." In it is quoted a marvelous letter to Mr. Coblentz giving a lot of good journalistic doctrine, but emphasizing the Hearst theory of the necessity for exciting news:

"We seem to have about everything, but we are, I think, too unconcerned about it.

"We seem to say to the reader, 'Well, there's all the news, but it does not interest us much. We don't think



WRH—"a kind of minor deity."

a lot of it. Perhaps you will be interested. That's your affair.'

"I think WE ought to be more interested in the news—more excited about it.

"In ancient times McEwen once said of the *American* that when you picked it up and looked at the first page, you said, 'Gee whiz!'

"And when you looked at the second page, you said, 'Holy Moses!'

"And at the third page, 'God Almighty!'

"He meant that there was surprise and excitement on each page.

"I think we need a little of those attractions now."

This is perhaps the best expression (it also appears in Mrs. Older's "authorized" biography of Hearst) of the basic doctrine of sensational journalism ever written—a doctrine which emphasizes not significance in the news, but excitement in it.

In the same chapter are several statements about pictures in the news which are admirable. Modern picture journalism owes much to Hearst, who had what seem to the present reviewer very sound ideas on the subject. Chief of these was the conviction that pictures must be treated with "judgment and discrimination as to their NEWS value."

But it is as a human document that this volume is chiefly valuable. Hearst's experiences as boy and man, how he took over the *San Francisco Examiner* and later the *New York Journal*, his personal adventures in covering the war in Cuba, his talks with Hitler, his expulsion from France, his "philosophy of life," his feeling for animals, his religion—the treatment of these things in Hearst "quotes" gives Mr. Coblentz's book its distinction in the rapidly accumulating Hearstiana.

Mr. Tebbel's book is of different



—Photos from Acme.

Marion Davies and W. R. Hearst—"an interesting cuss, with a talent for legerdemain."