

SR's Library Poll

OF the twenty books on SR's list this week, five are what are called "inspirational." Do people read these to learn how to solve their problems, or to indulge in silent thanks that they are not (yet) in the subjects' awful predicaments? One famous singer has battled back the bottle; in "TNT" the author recommends that we keep a mental image of what we desire; the Overstreets ask us to integrate ourselves, etc.

TITLE AND AUTHOR

1. **I'll Cry Tomorrow**
by Lillian Roth, Mike Connolly,
and Gerold Frank (G)*
2. **Mary Anne**
by Daphne du Maurier (F)**
3. **Not As a Stranger**
by Morton Thompson (F)
4. **Love Is Eternal**
by Irving Stone (F)
5. **A Child of the Century**
by Ben Hecht (G)
6. **The Power of Positive Thinking**
by Norman Vincent Peale (G)
7. **A Fable**
by William Faulkner (F)
8. **The Dollmaker**
by Harriette Arnow (F)
9. **The Fall of a Titan**
by Igor Gouzenko (F)
10. **TNT—The Power Within You**
by Claude Bristol (G)
11. **The Egyptian**
by Mika Waltari (F)
12. **The Mind Alive**
by Harry and Bonaro Overstreet (G)
13. **Cell 2455, Death Row**
by Caryl Chessman (G)
14. **Never Victorious, Never Defeated**
by Taylor Caldwell (F)
15. **Sweet Thursday**
by John Steinbeck (F)
16. **The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill**
by Hermann Hagedorn
17. **The Song of Ruth**
by Frank G. Slaughter (F)
18. **Madame de Pompadour**
by Nancy Mitford (G)
19. **Future Indefinite**
by Noel Coward (G)
20. **Applied Imagination**
by Alex F. Osborn (G)

PARTICIPATING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Atlanta (Ga.), Birmingham (Ala.), Buffalo (N.Y.), Chicago (Ill.), Cleveland (Ohio), Des Moines (Ia.), Los Angeles (Calif.), Louisville (Ky.), Miami (Fla.), Minneapolis (Minn.), New York (N.Y.), Omaha (Neb.), Philadelphia (Pa.), Pittsburgh (Pa.), Richmond (Va.), St. Louis (Mo.), Salt Lake City (Utah), Washington (D.C.).

* (G)—General
** (F)—Fiction



—Illustrations from "The Memoirs of Aga Khan."

Aga Khan with his younger son and the sons of Aly Khan—"a man without a country."

young Aly, on his first anniversary, against paper) they may wonder if it was all worth while. The book, incidentally, weighs \$6 against 367 pages.

PM's Grandfather

WINNIE'S RELATIONS: On a recent trip to America Winston Churchill journeyed to a small red brick house at 292 Henry Street in Brooklyn. This was his mother's birthplace, and his visit provided a sharp reminder that Britain's Prime Minister is indeed half American. Now Anita Leslie (daughter of Winston's first cousin Shane Leslie) provides another reminder in "The Remarkable Mr. Jerome" (Holt, \$4), a biography of the Leonard Jerome who in 1850 came from upper New York to purchase the Henry St. house. Depositing his young wife and child, he set out to conquer Wall Street. He did this with ease, a tall, dark, dashing man who made money with a flourish unusual in those money-conscious times. Then he bought horses, yachts, and a Madi-

son Square mansion, with a private theatre in the rear for musical evenings that rivaled the professional entertainment uptown.

In following the career of the flamboyant Leonard, Miss Leslie is led into a catherine-wheel of characters, each seemingly more colorful than the one before. The problem is which to follow. Leonard himself is somewhat neglected as his wife, unable to cope with his "intense aliveness," takes their three lovely, lively daughters to Paris. Leonard wanted his daughters to marry Americans; his wife dreamed of royalty. They chose Englishmen, Jennie (named, the author says, for Jennie Lind, in whom Leonard may have had more than passing interest) marrying Lord Randolph Churchill. But no matter who the husband—and Clara married Moreton Frewen, who succeeds in being the most fascinating character in an altogether fascinating book—Daddy was relied on to furnish common sense and cash. He did, though at fifty he wearied of making millions and worked at it only perfunctorily thereafter. —ALLEN CHURCHILL.

Genteel Realist

"Howells and the Age of Realism," by Everett Carter (J. B. Lippincott, 307 pp. \$5), is a critical study of the work of an outstanding chronicler of the American middle-class. Here it is reviewed by Irving Howe, author of "William Faulkner," "Sherwood Anderson: A Critical Study," and other critical and analytical works.

By Irving Howe

IN 1906 the grandniece of William Dean Howells complained that his writing lacked virility. Virile writing, she went on to explain, was "very strong, don't you know; and masterful; and relentless; and makes you feel as if somebody had taken you by the throat; and shakes you up awfully; and seems to throw you into the air and trample you underfoot." The young woman's critical vocabulary was somewhat melodramatic, and one would as soon not know which writers she felt might satisfy her vertiginous requirements; yet she had a point. Howells's half-prissy, half-humorous reply that he hoped "I'm a gentleman even when writing a novel" helps convince one she had a point.

Howells has largely been ignored in recent years. Several of his books still read very well; he is in many ways an admirable and even estimable figure; but he does not present a critical challenge, there is almost nothing in his work to discover or uncover, he is as transparent as a store-window, and as public too.

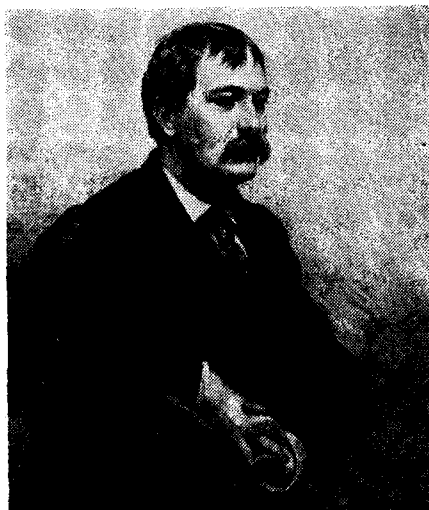
Now there is nothing necessarily bad in this critical "neglect." Nor is there any reason why all writers should be written or talked about with the same interest at any given time—so long, that is, as people remember that the critical attention given a Kafka doesn't mean that Fielding or Turgenev or Howells aren't worth reading. The study of Kafka presents acute and fascinating critical problems. The study of Howells does not.

Not even, one must regretfully say, in the conscientious book Everett Carter, who teaches English at the University of California, has now written. One cannot always be sure whether Mr. Carter writes from a

genuine passion for his subject or from an academic concern to "cover" a subject. For while his "Howells and the Age of Realism" has all the minor virtues, being sensible, careful, and compact, it is so organized as to be hopelessly academic. Instead of focusing upon Howells's performance as a novelist, Mr. Carter has chosen to concentrate on such secondary matters as the genesis of his work and its influence on other writers. Elaborately, and somewhat tediously, tracing the development of Howells's literary theories, he has used his often sensitive estimates as illustrations of the shifts in Howells's thinking.

This is a risky procedure, since it can sustain interest only in the case of a writer who is also a first-rate literary theorist—which Howells was not. Of course, Mr. Carter's method may be defended on the grounds of scholarship, which is sometimes made to justify the idea that anything relating to the biography of a writer, whether personal or intellectual, is fair game; but the result of such a procedure, almost always, is both promiscuous and anemic.

As it happens, Mr. Carter seems aware of the weakness in his approach and consequently interweaves critical vignettes of other writers—Edward Eggleston, Frank Norris, Mark Twain, Henry James—who were Howells's contemporaries. These prove to be among the best and liveliest passages in the book, though at times they succumb to another academic failing, the temptation to



—The Bettmann Archive.

Howells—"infatuation with normality."

aggrandize one's subject by making it seem more "significant" than it really is. Thus Mr. Carter feels obliged to enrol Mark Twain in Howells's school of realism (at least as a part-time student), which gives that school what it had not had before, a major writer; but which is also far-fetched as literary criticism, since in his best work Mark Twain, light-miles away from anything resembling Howells's or any other sort of realism, is actually a fabulist.

I MUST raise some other objections to Mr. Carter's approach. To study a writer in terms of his developing literary theories is largely to confine oneself to the plane of surface intentions. The famous formulation of "critical realism" with which Howells climaxed his literary thinking—a method of composition, he said, which "disperses the conventional acceptations by which men live on easy terms with themselves and obliges them to examine the grounds of their social and moral opinions"—is fine; but it cannot possibly tell us very much about the actual quality of Howells's writings during the time he worked up this definition. It does not tell us, for example, that he lacked one of the essential talents of the great writer, the talent for losing one's balance. "I like a man who plunges," said Melville about Hawthorne; and Howells, for all his courage in publicizing *Taine*, in becoming a Socialist, in defending the Haymarket anarchists, didn't plunge very deeply when it came to writing novels. Uneasily on the defensive, Mr. Carter remarks that Howells "was not by temperament a Faust." True; but that isn't what really matters.

Howells was trapped by his infatuation with normality, by his excessive concern, as Vernon L. Parrington remarked, with "the usual." He did not realize how normal abnormality is he did not sufficiently grasp the fact that even the most naturalistic novels are full of fantasy, grotesquerie, and symbolic distortions. I do not mean to complain that he wasn't a Dostoevsky or a Melville: he was under no obligation to pursue any vein but his own. I complain that he didn't pursue his own vein to its depths. It is sometimes said in his defense that he is one of the few writers who treats domestic life with a certain affectionate balance, and this is both true and a genuine literary virtue; but to see how he falls short even in this area one need only compare his treatment of the family with that of Tolstoy at the end of "War and Peace," where Tolstoy communicates not only the charm and felicity of domestic life