

A British Roman

"The Remarkable Young Man," by Cecil Roberts (Macmillan, 272 pp. \$3.50), is the biography of a young friend of Keats, Joseph Severn, and the fabulous world through which he moved in Rome of the 1820s.

By Lewis Vogler

IN 1820 upper-crust Rome lived in a strange frenzy of prosperity. As in the heyday of the Grand Tour, English milords with huge, untaxed incomes and retinues of servants arrived daily in great coaches. Great ladies in villas vied in providing entertainment for the cardinals, the Caetanis, and the Borgheses—and now, of course, the Bonapartes and the Bourbons—who occupied its *palazzos*. Pinchbeck nobility drifted in from everywhere. It was a time of balls, routs, extraordinary spectacles, of intrigue, gossip, and *l'amour*. Fortunately for the struggling artists who crowded Rome's studios, it was also a time of patronage—it was almost as fashionable to visit them as the gaming tables.

John Keats arrived in the early winter of that year, seeking only a gentler air than England's, already deep in the foreknowledge of his death. He was accompanied by a promising young art student from Shoreditch, Joseph Severn, a friend who recognized Keats's genius and attended him devotedly to the very end. Joseph Severn is "the remarkable young man" of a crowded, often vivid story by Cecil Roberts, a popular English novelist and romantic connoisseur of the Eternal City.

As the legend of Severn's devotion to the dead poet grew, so did his acquaintance in fashionable circles. Handsome and charming, enthusiastic and sincere, he soon became a protégé of Lady Westmorland, an iron-willed beauty who took most of Rome as her rival. Acquiring patrons, young Severn won the Travel Scholarship of the Royal Academy, began to achieve considerable success as a miniaturist and portrait painter. The author has followed his career for some six or seven years, until the time he married his infuriated benefactress' ward, Elizabeth Montgomerie—an event described as "one of the major scandals of the day." (As Mr. Roberts notes in a postscript, Severn had a long and busy life, achieved many honors, was later consul to Rome, died at the age of eighty-six, when he was buried alongside Keats in its Protestant Cemetery.)

Actually, "The Remarkable Young



—Jacket for "The Remarkable Young Man."

"... a time of gossip, *l'amour*."

Man" seems less the story of Joseph Severn than an attempt to evoke the life of the entire post-Napoleonic *beau monde*.

NEARLY every prominent person of the time, from George Bancroft—a visiting American, along with Joseph Coolidge and George Ticknor—to Madame Recamier is mentioned. The fated sculptor Canova, the great Thorwaldsen, the Duchess of Devonshire, the Princess Jerome Bonaparte, the Duc de Laval-Montmorency, Cardinal Consalvi, the King of Prussia—all jostle through his pages. There goes the carriage of the Duchess Cesarini-Sforza; here is a choice bit of scandal about Napoleon's sister, the wicked Princess Paulina, who keeps a giant blackamoor to carry her to and from the bath. The famous beauty Rosa Bathurst comes and is drowned on horseback in the swollen Tiber. James Freeborn receives Shelley's ashes for burial; the fierce, venturesome Trelawney follows, the burns still on his hands from having snatched the poet's heart from the pyre. News comes of Byron's death in Missolonghi; we are next made privy to the most recent love affair of his mistress, Teresa Guiccioli. The turbulent Walter Savage Landor—well, and so on.

Many of his vignettes are quite effective (no one is likely to forget the gruesome incident of the *mazzolata*—an execution by hammer of a young man who had supposedly killed a priest); his descriptions of Rome are excellent. "The Remarkable Young Man" is, of course, necessarily superficial. The author has been willing to sacrifice subtlety for sweep, has chosen to give us incident rather than insight. We have to hand it to him, all the same—it can't have been easy to compress the doings of so large an era into so small a volume, or material enough for thirty novels into one.

Dean of Symbolists

"The Haunted Man: A Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe," by Philip Lindsay (Philosophical Library, 256 pp. \$4.75), is a British literary critic's interpretation of his life and work. N. Bryllion Fagin, who reviews it below, is associate professor of English at Johns Hopkins University and author of "The Histrionic Mr. Poe."

By N. Bryllion Fagin

IN A prefatory note of dedication for his friend Gerald Kersh, Philip Lindsay, author of "The Haunted Man," the latest retelling of the known facts of Poe's life, makes no claim to original research. "Living in England as I do," he explains, "such research would be impossible." He is willing to accept the research done by other biographers, and especially Hervey Allen, Joseph Wood (regrettably printed as "Ward") Krutch, Arthur Hobson Quinn, and Marie Bonaparte. Apparently his own intention is "to find the essential Poe," to dig him out, as it were, from beneath the weight of scholarship, and to present him to the world "as a tortured great man who found the fever called living . . . too crushing for his weak will."

If Mr. Lindsay fails in his admirable intention—and he does, unfortunately, fail—it is precisely because, not having done any original research himself, he too often seems to be unable to distinguish fancy from fact, legend and hearsay from documentary proof, theory and speculation from authentic biography. He leans heavily on Hervey Allen—who himself occasionally indulged in fictional flights—and on Marie Bonaparte, whose "Life and Works of Edgar Allen Poe" is an interesting contribution to psychoanalytic literature but hardly a reliable biography. Mr. Lindsay finds Mr. Krutch's book on Poe "entirely convincing" and takes Dr. Quinn to task for thinking it based on a false theory—that of Poe's presumed sexual impotence—yet Mr. Krutch himself, in a recent review of a Poe book, remarked that his own biography had been "based on an unprovable thesis."

Mr. Lindsay no doubt wishes to do justice to Poe the writer who, because his culture was European—"based on European thought and writing"—received no justice "in a democracy he disliked." The great debt Poe owed to American—particularly Southern—traditional thought is completely overlooked. But even discounting this

oversight, one is at a loss to understand Mr. Lindsay's critical uncertainties. He is positive enough in his belief that Poe was not a good critic and that his "verse remained mainly adolescent and derivative, good rantic stuff for amateur reciters, but poetically of small value." Yet when he comes to specific works he finds that "To Helen" (the first poem with that title) "approaches pure poetry," that "The Haunted Palace" is "worthy of a place in anthologies," and that his later "To Helen" is "one of his finest poems." This is still a long way from the comments of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Valéry, and—to add at least one English writer—George Moore, but it does seem to modify the "small value" phrase.

For Mr. Lindsay, Poe's greatness is expressed in his short stories. Such tales as "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" are "immortal." Yet just what qualities make them great and insure their immortality remain undisclosed. Mr. Lindsay is convinced that Poe's stories are based on "sado-necrophile repressions, together with incest which symbolized his longing to possess a family." Perhaps. But if they are, is this reason enough for accepting them as works of literary art? Poe, Mr. Lindsay notes, was a dipsomaniac and an opium addict, and he was also a "frustrated, tormented creature without a solid background"; assuming that these are statements of fact—and not a repetition of romantic exaggerations—do they constitute an explanation of why Poe was able to create "out of his hell a handful of masterpieces" or why his stories deserve to be called masterpieces?

Mr. Lindsay's style deserves a brief mention. It abounds in such tortured inversions as "stone-hearted would any man have been who could have sent a child from his doors" and in such savorless aphoristic observations as "but women are amoral when they love," "but the young are impulsive," "every writer dreams of becoming famous" . . . What Buffon once said about the relationship between style and the man may not always apply, but one does wonder about the ideal equipment of a biographer, especially the biographer of a literary artist.

Notes

PROUST GUIDEBOOK: In the three decades since Marcel Proust's death his works and life have been the subject of mountains of criticism. The complexity of his art and the shadows of his life have made such intensive probing inevitable. Likewise inevitable has been a large degree of dis-

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BUSINESS

Taming the Boom-Bust Cycle

"Determining the Business Outlook," edited by Herbert V. Prochnow (Harper, 445 pp. \$6.50), a volume designed for the general reader, considers some twenty-five factors involved in business forecasting, each of them analyzed by a specialist in the field. Arthur Upgren, who reviews it here, is dean of the Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dartmouth College.

By Arthur Upgren

THE profession of business forecasting had become well established in this country by the late 1920s, but its general failure to predict the Great Depression indicated that it had not come even close to maturity. Attempts at forecasting production, prices, and income levels, like efforts to predict the weather, must assess a highly complex system of variable factors. These factors, as they are understood in 1954, are given a complete and amazingly readable treatment in Herbert V. Prochnow's fine compendium, "Determining the Business Outlook." Its nineteen chapters have been prepared by twenty-five men who are either busy interpreting economics to lay groups or who are economists on the staffs of business firms or private and public institutions. Their essays provide the businessman and the interested layman an excellent survey not only of the ways in which economic information is used in forecasting, but of the entire operation of our economy.

Each chapter is devoted primarily to showing how analysis of a particular phase of the economy—money supply, the level of stocks, bonds, and interest rates, fuels, construction, railroads, wages and employment, business failures—can contribute to the predictions upon which businessmen base their pricing, buying, and production policies, and upon which government agencies base their efforts to stabilize the economy. But this primary concern with methods of forecasting inevitably generates a great deal of practical information on how we Americans, all of us simultaneously producers and consumers, affect each other's welfare by our

ways of producing, saving, spending, and investing.

The methods of analysis are not, however, all mechanistic. The layman will be especially pleased to note that the contributors to this book take into account the psychological factors involved in business forecasting. Many attempts based on so-called "key factors," on polls, or on complicated mathematical analysis have failed because they could not predict the psychological dynamics of the consumer. Such a case was the widespread conviction that there would be a slump immediately after World War II. Another important oversight in this field has been the failure to observe and allow for the effects of predictions themselves on the behavior of businessmen and consumers. There will often be a sharp reaction to a prediction of economic recession, with the end result an unforeseen upsurge. This complex but intriguing topic of psychology is covered in the introductory chapter on the importance of business forecasting.

READERS willing to dig a little for what is good will be better rewarded by this book than by any other of its kind now available. The content of half-a-dozen specialized works is encompassed by its series of twenty-page chapters, and this is done without the ponderous air of mystery so characteristic of professional business literature. Most of the contributors have managed to incorporate their analytic material into a style that permits a relatively pleasant osmosis of information. Yet it is not a volume to be lightly undertaken, nor should it be. If its twenty sections were to be read and digested at the rate of one a week the reader would come by a better understanding of the issues, problems, and achievements

