Belles-Lettres

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do so Ricardo Quintana, whose "The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift" appeared twenty years ago (and was recently reissued), has now written the more compact **"Swift: An Introduction"** (Oxford University Press, $4.25).

It is an admirable answer to its author's purpose, for without startling new theories or old fallacies, he briefly summarizes Swift's career, then places him in the complex milieu of his time, and finally analyzes in detail the important writings of his successive phases as man of letters, journalist, Irish patriot, and creator of Lemuel Gulliver. In general Mr. Quintana uses an enlightened historical approach, basing his analyses squarely on the thought of Swift's period, and using modern insights when they fit. What a charming idea, for example, to say that the third book of "Gulliver's Travels" is like a scherzo in a four-movement symphony!

Broad interpretive "introductions" like this one are a very useful means of converting into palatable form the lucubrations of scholarly journals and monographs. If only publishers here were braver about undertaking such literary studies! A full-dress critical biography of Swift by John Middleton Murry was published in England last year. Will it ever see a publication date here? —R. H.

AMERICA'S STRENUOUS AGE: To organize and chart developments in comparatively recent American literature has been the gargantuan task of the critical historians. The complexity of their materials has forced many of them into processes of chronological dissection, the isolation of literary work, and even partial aspects of authors within given eras. The technique, while not always logically defensible, has been convenient enough to give us admirable treatises on the Twenties, the Thirties, and even the Forties. Now we have **"The Strenuous Age in American Literature"** (University of North Carolina Press, $4.50), which is Grant C. Knight's interpretation of the neglected decade 1900-1910 and a sequel to "The Critical Period in American Literature" (the 1890s).

The age of which he writes, exemplified in the strenuous endeavor of Theodore Roosevelt, has been damned by H. L. Mencken as "a time of almost inconceivable complacency and conformity." In the literature of this decade there were curiously diverse strains. The Graustarkian romance was still holding its own and Henry James was a powerful voice. But these, on the whole, were not so influential as the deterministic novels of Herrick, Phillips, London, Norris, and Dreiser. In an era dedicated to the philosophy of getting ahead, "Sister Carrie" was suppressed. This was a time of monopolies, of "Americanismus," and of playing the game hard and fair. There was the sentimentality of Booth Tarkington and O. Henry. But there was also the social protest of Upton Sinclair, the feminism of Edith Wharton, the muckraking of Ida Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens. And there were the writings of Santayana, William James, and Henry Adams ("the classic treatment of frustration"). It was an ambivalent age of puritan conscience and Nietzschean drive. This decade of transition from romanticism to realism was one in which writers of fiction and drama asserted their right to free expression. Compactly, year by year, Mr. Knight has traced major literary developments in the transition, integrating them with social, political, and economic trends. Intelligent cohesion of many elements enhances the handful

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of masterpieces produced in the decade. —E. A. B.

GUIDE TO WHITMAN'S VERSE: It is a truism of modern criticism that the meaning of a poem lies in the poem, not in the poet. It is difficult to attain this in the poetry of Whitman, for even in his own day he had become a legend (to some extent of his own doing); and since then attention has too often been focused on "The Solitary Singer" instead of on his "barbaric yawp." But this year, for at least two reasons, the score can be balanced. Gay Wilson Allen's exhaustive critical biography of Whitman tells all that can be gathered about the poet. And 1955 marks the centenary of the first edition of "Leaves of Grass," whose twelve untitled poems and pugnacious introduction announced the birth of a new American poetry.

As an aid to the reading of the poetry Professor Allen and a collaborator, Charles T. Davis, have edited **"Walt Whitman's Poems"** (New York University Press, $3.75), consisting of selections from "Leaves of Grass" and critical aids. In their long introduction they deal with general elements and the background of the poetry. The two longest poems they print are "Song of Myself" (the 1855 version instead of the ultimate one usually reprinted) and "Passage to India"; and there are a few dozen of the shorter ones. The commentary is somewhat tame and academic, which is not surprising since it originated in the editors' classrooms. But it will help any reader to a more thorough understanding of the poetry. —R. H.

WHITMAN IN OTHER TONGUES: Poetry is one of our most influential exports, and (paradoxically) while it tells other nations something about us, their response to it tells us something about them. This centennial year of "Leaves of Grass" is a good moment to survey the effect abroad of the "Yankee Saint," as Whitman has been called by a Latin-American critic. The editor of the survey **"Walt Whitman Abroad"** (Syracuse University Press, $4.) is Gay Wilson Allen, who is currently having a very busy season. He has gathered about two dozen critical essays and comments from all parts of the world, had them translated into English, and provided a brief preface for each section. (English-speaking parts of the world are omitted because their criticism is more easily available and readable.) The essays that stand out as particularly interesting are a German's comparison between Stefan George and Whitman, a Frenchman's essay on his poetic development, Knut Hamsun's freakish address on "the primitive poet," and a Brazilian's essay "Camerado Whitman." The inevitable fault of the collection is its uneven quality; but its virtues are considerable. They include a selected bibliography (at the end) of translations and additional critiques of Whitman. —R. H.

CHICAGO'S LITERARY AGE: A creative reawakening began in America about 1890, its forms and traits nowhere so clearly defined as in the literary activities of Chicago, which provided a center until 1926. The intellectual, cultural excitement of these three and a half decades is the subject of Bernard Duffey's compact history of **"The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters"** (Michigan State College Press, $6.50). Arbitrarily, but conveniently, he has categorized the movement into two groups and two generations. The first has to do with the protest against dominant business forces and the search for cultural independence (1890-1915). The second has to do with the realized liberation (1915-1926). The first generation of the Chicago renaissance was coincident with a national turning from romanticism toward genteelism, realism, and Whitmanian "popularized" poetry; and with the emergence of libraries, museums, literary societies, and the University of Chicago, among other institutions. The second generation in Chicago's muscular proving ground were bohemian rebels, invoking the cries of Nietzche, Freud, Marx, and Theodore Dreiser. The first group spoke out in newspaper columns (Eugene Field, George Ade, Finley Peter Dunne) and in novels (Henry Blake Fuller, Hamlin Garland, Robert Herrick predominantly). The second is represented by such names as Floyd Dell, Maxwell Bodenheim, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Ben Hecht. The powerful voices of the renaissance were unified and magnified by literary societies—The Little Room, The Round Table, The Dill Pickle Club. And they were encouraged by such organs as *Dial, America,* Francis Hackett's *Friday Literary Review,* Harriet Monroe's *Poetry,* Hecht's short-lived *Literary Times,* and the book pages of Harry Hansen in the *Daily News* and Burton Rascoe in the *Tribune.* The Chicago Little Theatre also had an important part. By 1926 the exodus to New York was well under way, but Chicago had established the American literary temperament. Mr. Duffey's book, too small for its wealth of political, social, and literary details, sometimes threatens mental indigestion. But it is knowl-

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