



Books

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LITERARY HORIZONS

Perspective on Prosperity

THE THIRTEEN stories in Louis Auchincloss's *Tales of Manhattan* (Houghton Mifflin, \$4.95) are divided into three groups: "Memories of an Auctioneer," "Arnold & Degener, One Chase Manhattan Plaza," and "The Matrons." All touch in one way or another the world of wealth, power, and social distinction that Auchincloss has made peculiarly his.

The first five stories are told in the first person by Roger Jordan, who works for and is later vice president of "the ancient auction gallery of Philip Hone & Sons, at the corner of Park Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street." One is the tale of a man who spent his fortune on a castle off the coast of Maine; another deals with an eminent professor and a young charlatan; a third portrays a painter who just misses fame. All the stories show how knowledgeable Auchincloss is, and the writing is urbane and often witty. For instance, in speaking of the promotion of hitherto obscure painters, Jordan says: "Still, as the masterpieces of art, swept by the inexorable law of the income tax, drop, first one by one, then dozen by dozen, into the great sea of museums, that bourne from whence no traveler returns, it behooves us dealers to develop the public taste in the direction of lesser but more accessible artists."

Each of the stories has a surprise ending. All we think we know about the man who built the castle is suddenly reversed by his daughter. The charlatan does contribute to the reputation of the professor, though not in the way the latter had expected. The secret of the unappreciated painter turns out to be rather shocking. The fact that surprise endings are old-fashioned doesn't bother me, but I feel that four out of the five stories are obviously contrived.

The fifth story, "The Money Juggler," is both more credible and more substantial than the others. Four members of the Columbia Class of 1940—a Wall Street broker, a popular columnist, a

corporation lawyer, and the auctioneer-narrator—are having lunch together. Their chief topic of conversation is "the failure and flight from justice of our classmate Lester Gordon," who had enjoyed a series of spectacular successes. None of the four had liked Gordon, either in college or afterwards, and they all take pleasure in his downfall. But as the conversation proceeds it becomes clear that each of these men, who consider themselves morally superior to Gordon, has had a share of the profits he has so unethically amassed. The theme is one that Bernard Shaw exploited in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Major Barbara*—the universality of guilt. Shaw, of course, had a way of escape: change the system, adopt Socialism. Auchincloss has no remedy. The narrator says: "Is that capitalism? That the aristocrat, the intellectual, and the professional are bound to the chariot of the money juggler?" But in the end he falls back on cynicism: "What were we but four junior Gordons?"

The stories in the third section are pleasant but not particularly profound. The central characters are for the most part pathetic: the extra man, the hanger-on in good society, who has to face the fact that he is no longer in demand; the highly competent mother of four children who is taught her limitations; a woman on whom everyone imposes; a man who has made great sacrifices for his family. These are stories that Edith Wharton, whom Auchincloss admires, might have written in her later years.

By far the best group of stories is the second, all of them concerned, as are the stories in *Powers of Attorney*, with members of a mighty law firm in downtown New York. One of the partners says: "I plunged into the pool of law like a hot boy on a July day. The orderly, hierarchical atmosphere of the firm, where one knew precisely at all times what was expected of one and where one rose from tier to tier pretty much in

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proportion to one's efforts, seemed to me a tiny civilization in the midst of chaos, a Greek city-state on a plain surrounded by barbarians. I loved the law from the beginning and loved the practice of it. I have never believed in the sincerity of those who pretend to find it difficult to live within a code." I would not suggest that Auchincloss fully shares this exalted opinion of the profession to which he belongs. He would scarcely say, with the Lord Chancellor in *Iolanthe*, "The Law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent." But, like James Gould Cozzens, who is not a lawyer, Auchincloss is fascinated with the law both as an attempt to apply reason to human affairs and as, for literary purposes, a background against which the irrationalities so common in human behavior can be effectively exhibited.

In the first of the four stories in this group Sylvaner Price, now the dominant partner of Arnold & Degener, is trying to give a proper official account of Guthrie Arnold, the founder; but something—perhaps, he thinks, the senior partner's ghost—keeps compelling him to tell the truth. The discrepancy between public image and reality is a recurring theme. Foster Evans learns something about himself and something about Lewis Bo-

vee, his ideal: "Mr. Boyce at the end of his long table, dispensing compliments and offering little toasts, might have been the man with the long whip surrounded by seemingly docile tigers perched on stools. The whip was the law, and without the law he and I well knew to what a shambles life was reduced. Yes, my tragedy, or at least my bathos, is that I have been simply a lawyer. My guide and mentor was, in his own fashion, a man." Eric Temple, the heretical New Dealer, fares well even when under investigation by Senator McCarthy. Cliffie Dean, who leads a revolution against Lloyd Degener, gets what he wants and regrets it. ("Save a bees' nest from a burning bush, and you can count on them to sting you.")

In "The Money Juggler" Roger Jordan says: "Glancing from John to Townie to Hilary, I was suddenly struck by the size of their common denominator. It was in their eyes, in the opaque glitter of their distrustful eyes. They were all prosperous, all expensively and similarly clad. I would have defied John O'Hara himself to have told in that assemblage of colored shirts, which was the descendant of a colonial governor, which the popular columnist and which the Wall Street lawyer. Over their apparel, which was as beautiful as a *New Yorker* advertisement, glowed the snakes' eyes that saw the world at a snake's level: one inch above the ground." The irony is that the narrator's eyes can't be more than an inch higher. Auchincloss has a larger vision than that, but not so large as I could wish.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT No. 1235

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1235 will be found in the next issue.

AM JPC DEMJCTJ XCJRCCM CYTC

YMW NAXCKJZ, JPC VAKTJ PYJP

BCMCKYNNZ LKCIYANCW.

—PYNAVYH

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1234

Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few.

—SHAW.

LETTERS TO THE Book Review Editor



Concentration Camps on Hand

IT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN, says Roger Baldwin in his introduction to *Concentration Camps, U.S.A.*, by Charles R. Allen, Jr. [SR, Mar. 18]. Those who have the courage to read this little book will learn that not only in Hitler Germany did the natives claim not to have known of these camps which were situated within ten miles or less from their homes, but that natives of Allentown, Pa.; El Reno, Okla.; Florence, Ariz.; Wickenburg, Ariz.; and Tule Lake, Calif., are also not aware of our projected use of these sites for concentration camps, based on Title II of the McCarran Internal Security Act.

Since 1952 these camps have been kept in "readiness" despite our then-President Truman's veto message of that portion of the McCarran Act.

MOLLIE G. AUGUST.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Vilified for Profit?

THE REVIEW BY MARGUERITE CLARK of *The Healers* [SR, Mar. 11] is alarming and disturbing on many counts. . . .

The medical profession is certainly no worse than the clergy and the lawyers. We are all human beings and there will always be a scoundrel in our midst. However, I know that the great majority of physicians are dedicated to healing the sick with little thought for themselves. . . . Certainly a physician wishes to receive due recompense commensurate with the years of study and preparation that go into his long and essentially unsubsidized training period. Eight to ten years after college is perhaps the longest post-graduate training in our society, and a physician has a right to a reasonable return on this investment and for the long hours and constant strain that are his way of life. It is only the insecure and ineffective, however, who would spin a tall tale to justify a big bill, and if this is done, I suspect the purpose is really to bolster the ego rather than to fill the pocketbook. . . .

I object to the implication that medical school-hospital services are the only places where honest medicine is likely to be practiced or that medical schools take over more and more hospitals in order to make them honest. . . . The profession actively polices itself and does not need the medical schools to do the job for it. The suggestions made in this book, if taken seriously, could undermine years of effort expended in bringing the medical school teachers and the community physicians together in the job of continuing education for all physicians for the betterment of patient care. Physicians have been working very hard at this business of keeping up to date and are beginning to examine themselves to see how successful their efforts are. How many other professions do this?

It seems to me that the medical profes-

sion as a whole has been vilified—for profit—by Anonymous, M.D. and by Putnam, the publisher. An apology is due.

RICHARD W. VILTER, M.D.

GORDON TAYLOR,

Professor of Medicine

HELEN HUGHES TAYLOR,

Director, Department of Medicine,
University of Cincinnati.

Cincinnati, O.

McCarthyism Over

MAY I CONGRATULATE *Saturday Review* for printing Granville Hicks's candid review of *Think Back on Us* in the March 11 issue. The McCarthy era is over when a writer can state in a national magazine that he was once a member of the Communist Party.

MRS. KENNETH F. KISTER.

Belmont, Mass.

Too Revealing

MR. GRANVILLE HICKS in his review of Elia Kazan's novel *The Arrangement* [SR, Mar. 4] states that the question asked by Mr. Kazan's work is "what do and what should men live by?" In the course of his review, Mr. Hicks reveals the hero's solution to his search. Is a reviewer justified in disclosing a plot development that answers in advance a question the reader would be asking himself as the character study of the hero progresses?

Don't both author and prospective reader have just cause for complaint?

TERESA C. CAMPBELL.

Tucson, Ariz.

Borrowed Culture

YOUR REVIEW OF PIERRE GASCAR'S *The Best Years* [SR, Feb. 11] mentions as one of the pleasures of childhood in Aquitaine "Hallowe'en with its pumpkins and ghosts." My wife, who was brought up in Belgium, does not remember Hallowe'en as a European tradition, and her botany books definitely make pumpkins a strictly American plant. Had the sons of Aquitaine been doing a little cultural borrowing, or what?

GORDAN B. CHAMBERLAIN.

Tokyo, Japan

Frodo's Native Tongue

YOU ARE CORRECT IN WRITING in reference to Frodo [SR, Mar. 18]: "He speaks Elvish." However, it should be noted that Elvish was a second language for Mr. Baggins. Tolkien notes that "Frodo is said to have shown great skill with foreign sounds." His native language was Westron, or the Common Speech. The ancestral language of the Hobbits had died out (except for place names) by the Third Age of Middle earth.

CJ STEVENS.

Bronx, N.Y.