

THE SATURDAY REVIEW

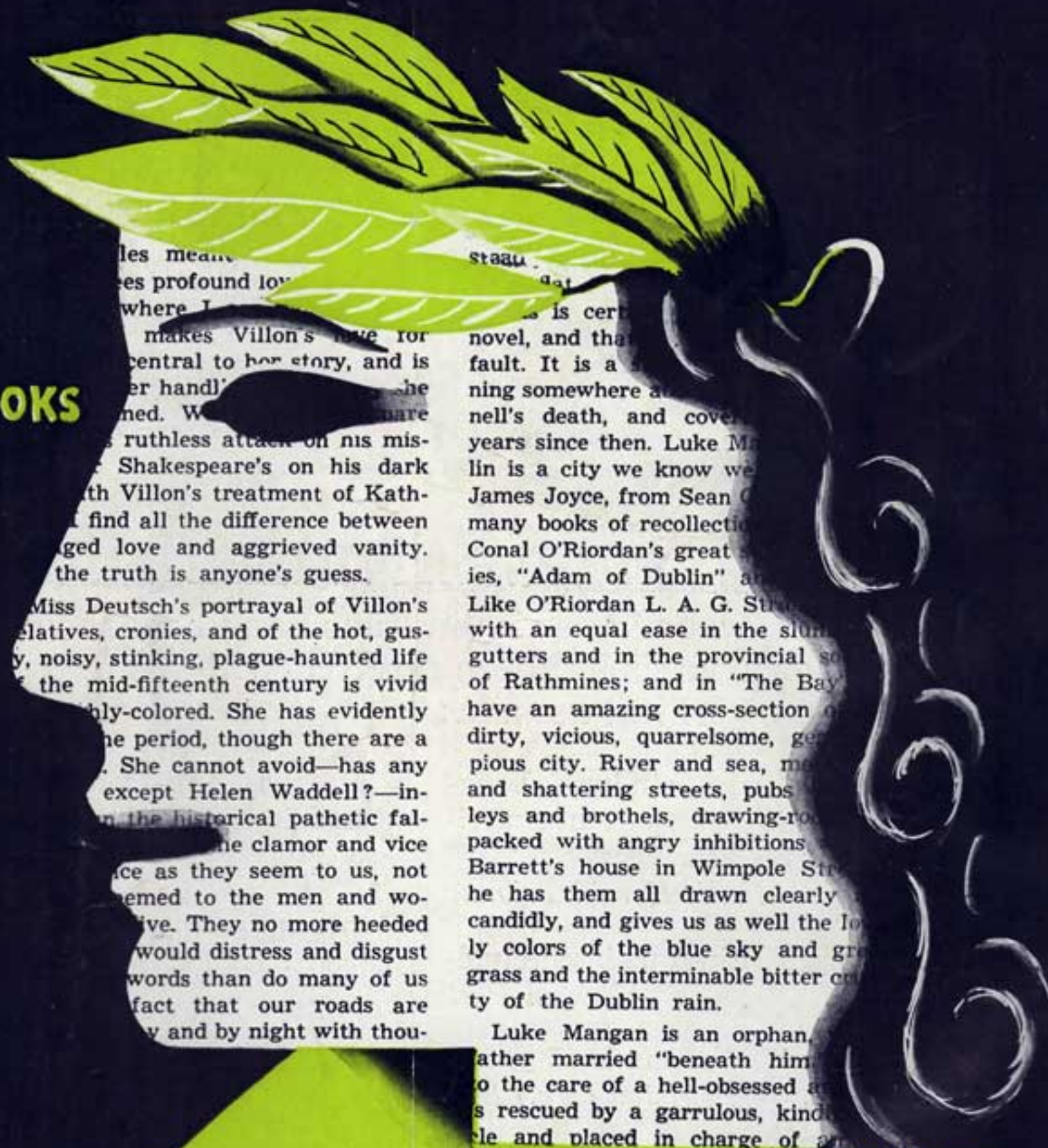
OF LITERATURE

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FIFTEEN CENTS

SPRING BOOKS



les mean
ees profound lov
where I
makes Villon's love for
central to her story, and is
er handli
ned. W
are
ruthless attack on his mis-
Shakespeare's on his dark
th Villon's treatment of Kath-
find all the difference between
ged love and aggrieved vanity.
the truth is anyone's guess.

Miss Deutsch's portrayal of Villon's
relatives, cronies, and of the hot, gus-
y, noisy, stinking, plague-haunted life
of the mid-fifteenth century is vivid
ly-colored. She has evidently
the period, though there are a
She cannot avoid—has any
except Helen Waddell?—in-
the historical pathetic fal-
the clamor and vice
ce as they seem to us, not
emed to the men and wo-
ive. They no more heeded
would distress and disgust
words than do many of us
fact that our roads are
y and by night with thou-

staau
is cer
novel, and that
fault. It is a
ning somewhere at
nell's death, and cover
years since then. Luke M
lin is a city we know we
James Joyce, from Sean O
many books of recollectio
Conal O'Riordan's great s
ies, "Adam of Dublin" an
Like O'Riordan L. A. G. Str
with an equal ease in the slum
gutters and in the provincial so
of Rathmines; and in "The Bay
have an amazing cross-section of
dirty, vicious, quarrelsome, ge
pious city. River and sea, me
and shattering streets, pubs
leys and brothels, drawing-roo
packed with angry inhibitions
Barrett's house in Wimpole Str
he has them all drawn clearly
candidly, and gives us as well the lo
ly colors of the blue sky and gre
grass and the interminable bitter co
ty of the Dublin rain.

Luke Mangan is an orphan,
father married "beneath him"
to the care of a hell-obsessed a
s rescued by a garrulous, kind
le and placed in charge of a

McKnight Kauffer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Factual Fiction

SIR:—What frame of mind, I wonder, nowadays, befits the plodding historian when the result of his patient and pedestrian labors is acclaimed as a not unsatisfying romance? If readers like the book—reflection whispers—what more can a sane author require? And should his reviewers upon the whole commend it, why, then, what livelier form of Rhadamanthine charity can a reviewer be hoped to exhibit? The historian in such odd circumstances has not, I admit, any personal grievance; for the injustice involved does not in any tangible way hurt him, nor his prosperity; but works, rather, to exaggerate his inventiveness.

Even so, my conscience does a bit trouble me over the reception granted to my most recent book, "The First Gentleman of America." People at large, and in print also, have been fairly affable as to these "legendary adventures of the prince of a mythic country." The point, though—the ever pricking point which today harries my conscience—is that the adventures were no more legendary than the kingdom was mythic. For "The First Gentleman of America" is all sober-sided factual history, throughout, except for some few gaps which had to be bridged by fancy or patched up with inference; so that at the call of conscience, I shall here confess that to treat this book as "romance" seems rather grossly unfair to the first native-born American who figures in history, and to the first of all great Virginians.

I become, you see, and in spite of custom, wholly serious, now that I needs confess to my unblushing theft, from veracity, of the entire story. From the Northern Neck of Virginia, which was then called Ajacan, an exploring party of Spaniards did fetch, in 1561, an Indian chief, who in Mexico was christened Luis de Velasco; who became thoroughly civilized; who passed ten easeful years, as the recipient of a royal pension and with the rank of a grandee, in Mexico, in Florida, and at the court of King Philip II—in all which places Don Luis appears to have drawn his own conclusions as to the merits of Spain's Nazi-like inhuman culture; and who in consequence, when in 1571 he was sent back to his native Ajacan as the patron of a Spanish colony, quite calmly destroyed that colony, with a completeness so unsparing that no Spaniard ever again attempted to establish Spain's bleak rule in that part of North America.

To declare this performance an important event is to deal in the brusque and brittle art of understatement a bit over-profusely. But for Don Luis de Velasco, the Spaniards during the following year would have sent, as was foreplanned, yet further settlers;



"The way I figure it, I can't afford to be pardoned. This is the third story I've sold this month."

the present Commonwealth of Virginia, and in due course, to all likelihood, the entire Atlantic seaboard, would have become a Spanish colony; nor would Jamestown or Plymouth ever have detained the attention of any primary pupil even transiently. Upon 2 February 1572, in brief, the Indian-born Don Luis de Velasco changed, and in changing he predetermined, the fate of a continent. He left it free to become English.

That had seemed to me a feat worthy of commemoration through—I can but repeat—the patient and pedestrian labors of an historian. So I wrote out the man's biography as a staid and as a matter-of-fact, and even as a perhaps timely, account of the first American to undertake, and with competence to perform, the large task of defending America. I was at pains to list all my "sources," in a rather closely printed five-page Bibliography; the Virginian portions of the book have been endorsed in public and editorially by such specialists as Virginius Dabney and Douglas Freeman; the Floridian half of it (after having been checked in proof by such yet other specialists as Edward W. Lawson and A. J. Hanna) have been officially commended by the Florida Historical Society as a serious contribution to the state's archives: and yet, under a palliation of friendly approval, yet to my reviewers, and in consequence to my readers, this book remains "the legendary adventures of the prince of a mythic country."

What then is one to do? To be accredited with an imagination so lively as to have made up the entire incredible tale of Don Luis de Velasco is wholly flattering, one grants; and yet I very much prefer, at the cost

of undeserved plaudits, to assure Americans at large that in their history the first chapter was contributed by an American whom they have coldly forgotten. In fact, it seems to me a chapter which at this special moment might merit some special attention. Not merely through unmeaning chance, I elect to think, was the first known of all native Americans a patriot who rid his land of invaders.

JAMES BRANCH CABELL.

Date, Please

SIR:—In scientific journals, the date at which the manuscript was received is often given. Would this practice not be appropriate for books as well, especially in these days of rapid change, not only for the convenience of present readers but as an aid to scholars in years to come?

For example, one would like to know whether certain books dated 1941 were completed before or after the Nazi invasion of Russia, before or after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. One would like to know just when a certain brochure was finished which contained the phrase, "if Greece holds out" and when the originals of some very important translations were first published.

It is true that the precise date is given at the end of some prefaces. But why should not all publishers agree to put on the Copyright Page the day and the month as well as the year on which a completed manuscript is received or when the final proof is corrected. This would save many of us a lot of trouble—and also the worry as to whether some authors are fools or prophets.

HOUSTON PETERSON.

New York, New York