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of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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THE DUAL CABELL
(Drawing by Papé)

Radical Conservatism

WHAT writers and readers need at the moment is a dose of radical conservatism. The literary period of the twenties is as obsolete as the industrial age of the twenties. The epoch of extravagant experiment is nearing the end, both in prosperity and in books. The new economic order which was to have no resemblance to the sweat-and-save methods of the past is now a jest, and the innovations by which novels were to become essays; plays, sermons; poems, crossword puzzles; and biographies, psychoanalyses, have exposed their absurdities and already contributed their useful novelties to the stock of tools of the writing trade. Our break with the Victorian age has been made so complete that we can read Tennyson with the detachment of a Frenchman or a Chinese. Our break with the preciosity of the nineties, and with its romantic enthusiasm, is so sharp that already affection is beginning to creep back into the comments of this end-of-a-period upon the *fin de siècle*. Mr. Mencken no longer rages against the stuffed shirts of tradition for they are no longer dangerous. It is not smart to be rebellious any more, and even the communist intellectuals are more interested in building a future than in whacking their ancestors.

What new loyalties (see Mr. Hale's recent book), what new creations for housing the imagination, may come of all this, we do not attempt to prophesy. But this surely may be said: that the time has come to salvage the good wood from the general wreckage that has been made of the efforts of the last generation. We have seen a forestry operation conducted on our plot of culture. The dead branches have been lopped, the rotten trees axed, the soft and worthless growths cleared away (and many a green and pretentious reputation crashed with them!), and the suppressed undergrowth has shot up with a brutal vigor. But the time has come now for planting, which means to consider the soil and to look carefully at the trees which still survive our pruning. The old oaks and the stout hickories have, it may prove, lasting virtues. They sit the soil; there is something to be learned from them.

For no age has made a clean sweep of its past, and every age of transition reaches a moment when it becomes more important to determine what was desirable in the old régime than to invent novelties or destroy what seems outworn. We have reached that moment, and it is the

duty of those whose experience goes back to the last decade of relative stability to admit honestly the desuetude of much that seemed important, but to defend resolutely those things which still deserve good report. This is a hard task, for it is difficult, after the twenties, to renounce prejudice, admit error, accept change, and yet hold fast to a residuum of good. But it is essential.

In other words, these new years of the thirties seem likely to be years of stabilization in literature, and perhaps in economics. We know too much, and are doing too little. Theories, literary and economic, are as plentiful as blueberries in Maine. The writer can say what he pleases, and say it as he pleases, up to the point of unintelligibility, and, some would say, beyond. He needs roots now more than new hybridization of flowers. A little conservatism would do him good.

But it is conservatism, in its true sense, not reaction, which is meant. And true conservatism is always radical. It seeks to save from the past only what is alive; it seeks to make for the future only something as radically different from the past as is the generation it works in. Real radicalism, in short, in this moment of time, would be conservative.

There are many signs that the boys and girls now in their earliest twenties are in this mood already. They are ten times more frank and more honest than were their parents in the nineties, in part because no one has fed them on illusions. Yet their honesty is no longer rebellious, perhaps because it is no longer suppressed by a complacent authority. The war shattered that complacency, and 1929-1932 has wrecked it completely. The anarchy and the cynicism of the twenties seem to appeal to this youth not at all. They are looking for ground to stand on, and will choose it without prejudice. But they show not the slightest likelihood of being, or of working, like their parents. Their prose and poetry, now that it is beginning to represent them, is not reactionary, not imitative beyond what is usual in youth, yet it is conservative, radically conservative, in that it seems to be reaching back to what is still alive after all the buffetings of the "new world" men of our age of anarchy, in order from such solidity to build something radically new. At the moment this is scarcely more than a prophecy, but tomorrow it may become fact.

Good-Bye to You

By JOSEPHINE PINCKNEY

NOW the tensile heart-strings
snap,
Pulled beyond enduring;
Let me go, though I fall,
Though you subtract past curing
The lime, the substance of my bones,
That they buckle sprawling,
Too spongy to uphold the heart
Rock-ribs were lately walling.
From you who gave my body life
Surely as did my mother
I turn one doleful, springless foot
Away and then the other.
Though ribs once wrapped me round
compact
With swaddling-bands, the lusty
And greening child no longer I
But the mummy yellow-dusty.
Now the morbid, cankered limbs
Are constrained to hurry;
Let me go. Hold not one
Only ripe to bury.

Art, Beauty, and Balderdash

By BRANCH CABELL

BECAUSE of my own peccadilloes in print I was privileged no great while ago to attend a gathering of some forty professional writers under frankly educational auspices. We responded, it may be, to our auspices. In any case, affairs had reached the stage called "an open discussion" of I never discovered just what, and the refrain of our morning-long liturgy stayed constant.

One after another these somewhat strange looking persons—for authorship, whatever it may do for the mind, does not beautify the body—arose and coughed. Thereafter each so deferentially cleared throat spoke with dauntless conviction of our duty—of our multifold duties to the public, to art, to altruism, to posterity, to the American spirit (for it was generally agreed that our masterworks ought to be "autochthonous"), and I even heard two elderly persons of my own obsolete generation dwell upon our special duty toward that free-handed Deity who had blessed us with special talents. It all sounded most handsomely, and it made the business of writing any salable form of reading-matter seem a high-minded and painful pursuit wherein only seers and martyrs might hope to endure.

I listened, I admit, in extreme melancholy begotten by low envy of such elevated sentiments. My reflection was that for some reason or another such sentiments quite obviously caused their expounder's socks to wrinkle and to slide yet more downward, the higher that his moral fervor aspired. In the while that I wondered over this phenomenon the young woman who sat beside me remarked sotto voce, "But I write because I like to."

I looked at that intelligent young woman with instant affection. I was cheered at once, to my heart's core, by this plaintive small heresy, which had made me feel no longer signal in irresponsibility and low-mindedness. I became charitable. I perceived that at any rate the most of my confrères were talking so much sonorous nonsense out of a general notion that it was expected of them under our present auspices. But I remarked only, in confidence, to my new-found friend, "Me too!"

Well, and now I am reminded of this brief incident after reading, with commingled zest and irritation, Mr. Max Schoen's "Art and Beauty"—though indeed I think the incident applies to all books ever published upon the nature and aim of esthetics. Whosoever writes or talks publicly about esthetics inclines to a great deal of magniloquent balderdash. It is expected of him. He must justify art upon some moral ground or another, very much as did my confrères exalt our trade of writing to the plane of self-sacrificing duty. He must rank the artist somewhere between the seer and the martyr. And he must of course ignore the fact that the artist pursues his art in chief because—as my comely savior put it—"he likes to."

I do not mean that Mr. Schoen always writes balderdash. To the contrary, I find the entire first half of his book, as it deals with "Art and the Artist," rich in much excellent matter which I would recommend without stint to the discerning reader.

The second half, concerning "Art and

* Art and Beauty. By Max Schoen. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1932. \$2.

the Layman," I dismiss ruefully, for here again one is lugged toward the gray and barren uplands of duty. To be told how and why and with what thoroughness you ought to assimilate art and beauty, and how much real good they will do you, stays to my finding as unappetizing as a discourse upon the dietary value of spinach and of turnip salad. It provokes, somehow, an irrational dislike of the proffered fare. Nor can any prose writer be expected to view with equanimity Mr. Schoen's pronouncement hereabouts: "Poetry, fiction, and drama use a common material, language, and therefore a study of the nature of any one of the three is also an examination of the nature of the other two." He then (it really does seem incredible) discusses poetry upon the assumption that he is thus disposing of all literature and all drama.

Well, but let us paraphrase this. Weddings, christenings, and funerals use a common material, the prayer book; and therefore a study of the nature of marriage is also an examination of the nature of death. The reasoning appears to me the same, and the deduction equally fallacious. For the considerate person the broad gap between the sophomoric of poetry and the refinements of intelligent prose is not to be bridged by stating that both Edgar Guest and George Jean Nathan employ "language." And to declare that the material of acted drama also is "language" appears rather like asserting that a suit of clothes is made of buttons. The buttons and the dialogue are components, but they are noticeably remote from being the entire material. You have but to resort to your radio this very evening to perceive how far does the broadcasting of any play (which preserves all the "language") differ from your witnessing an acted drama in its fit theatre.

From this much fault-finding I return with respectful admiration to Mr. Schoen's discussion of "Art and the Artist." All this part of his thesis is well considered, it is sage (as sage, that is, as any gravely designed book about esthetics can hope to be), it is thorough, and it is competently done. I have read every line of these 130 pages with unflagging interest. I applaud them, if that matters, heartily. I observe in them one sole defect.

For I have read all these pages in an

This Week

"THE SOUL OF AMERICA."

Reviewed by HELEN HILL.

"ELLEN TERRY & HER SECRET SELF."

Reviewed by TEMPLE SCOTT.

"THE DILEMMA OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE."

Reviewed by IRWIN EDMAN.

"LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN."

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

"THE LIFE OF ROBERT BURNS."

Reviewed by I. DELANCEY FERGUSON.

Next Week, or Later

IDA M. TARBELL'S "OWEN D. YOUNG."
Reviewed by STUART CHASE.

ever-foiled hope of finding by-and-by some direct statement as to why an artist pursues his art. "The creative impulse," says Mr. Schoen, "has been traced by many writers to have a social origin, as arising from the desire to communicate to others what the artist experiences. But to attribute the herculean labors and sufferings of the creative minds of the ages to such a trite purpose indicates a most naive conception of the nature of human experience and a disregard, to say the least, of the records of artistic history." In yet another passage Mr. Schoen has pointed out that art is not "actuated by a desire to please. . . . Genius does what its nature compels it to do, irrespective of consequences." And again Mr. Schoen says: "The artist can no more give a reason for his works than he could for his life. His work is his life and his reason for living."

All which is very well and wholly true, so far as it goes. Yet all these dicta approach without ever quite touching the dodged truth that every artist pursues his art in chief because he enjoys that pursuit, just as unexplainedly (to the opinion of some of us) as other zealots enjoy the pursuit of a fox or of a golf ball.

It is in each case an indulgently regarded form of time wasting. The large difference is that nobody pretends that the fox hunter or the golf player is actuated by his strong sense of duty or by altruism or by any other moral motive. These sports are ordinarily discussed by relatively unbiased persons. But most books about esthetics emanate from the professional art critic or the professional artist—of whom neither is at liberty to question the importance of art without impugning thereby his sole excuse for existing and the honesty of his livelihood. Mere self-respect will implant in him an heroic predisposition against cutting off his next year's income.

It follows that mankind has but infrequent prompters to face the triviality of any finished art product—whether it be a statue or a sonnet or a symphony—in man existence. It follows that (to the st of my limited knowledge) in no book . . . out esthetics is the fact dwelt upon that if every existent art work could be dumped into the Pacific Ocean next Monday morning, the most of us would be jogging on quite comfortably by Tuesday afternoon.

I do not mean only that inestimable millions lead gratifying and useful lives without devoting any instant therein to "art." It requires but a moment's frankness to see that "art" takes no important part in the life of a solid and reliable citizen, howsoever cultured. The merchant prince, the lawyer, and the bootlegger, in common with the butcher, the baker, and (if he yet thrives) the candlestick maker, must perforce pass days hand running untroubled by any consideration of "art." To each of these national bulwarks, all "art" remains but an occasional stopgap for some vacant hour when there is no business of real importance in hand: to each of these, the more trite, the more nugatory, and the more readily comprehensible exercises of "art" are the more congenial, as necessitating the least mental effort; and for no self-respecting taxpayer, at the year's end, does the time which he has devoted to "art" equal the time he has spent at the telephone or in the bathtub.

Nor is it, very happily, anything save yet more balderdash to esteem that these scattered moments given up to "art" can infect and permeate the remaining hours of professional and family life. The emotions roused by contemplating an esthetic masterpiece are shallow; as chalk with cheese, so do they compare in gusto with any private personal emotion; and after all they prove so beneficently transient that we are not operated upon by surgeons who are thinking meanwhile about Beethoven; the plumber does not waste yet additional time in our lavatories by discussing Proust with his helper; and a board of directors is but rarely heartened during the official passing of a dividend (or, so at least I am informed) by any devotion to Leonardo da Vinci.

Now by the practising artist, I admit,

the time devoted to art is more considerable. I admit, too, that the pursuit of his art is to him an affair of supreme and very much exaggerated importance. My point is merely that the importance of each finished art work to the artist also remains small. That is natural. To achieve competence in any art one must hammer away at it unremittingly, at least twenty-five hours to the day, so that no artist can afford an actual interest in the sister arts to his own branch of esthetics. He may, of course, quite harmlessly affect such interest. I have known in fact many writers who pretended to appreciate music, just as I have met few musicians who did not admit him- or her-self to be an authority upon literature, as well as, for that matter, everything else.

I pause here. I reflect upon the loud omniscience of most musically gifted persons, and it prompts me to confine myself to my own bailiwick of spoilt paper and tinkling typewriters. . . . I know then, but too well, that the professional writer, in addition to his profound ignorance of all the arts save literature, very rarely ever reads anything. The trouble is, I suspect, that when once he has mastered his trade the acknowledged masterpieces of literature, for the most part, must appear to him either too childishly conceived or else too ill executed to evoke more than an antiquarian interest. And, of course, he regards with a vivid and thinly veiled abhorrence the writings of those fellow practitioners who are yet alive. Of this latter truth at least I am wholly certain, because I have survived some thirty years of hearing authors talk about their contemporaries.

I know, too, that no conscientious writer can look upon his own finished books with much less abhorrence, in the light of their multitudinous flaws and shortcomings, which he, ill-fated, is doomed to perceive more clearly than may the most callow and unsympathising reviewer. And from no one of these known facts can I deduce that any writer could possibly object to having all literature, along with all other art works, dumped into the Pacific Ocean next Monday morning.

I admit, though, that in each writer's heart a trace of tenderness lingers for the plaything which he has most recently completed in book form. Even though he might pay the postage as far as California, he would not convey that book thither in person. That book as yet remains near and in some sort stays a part of him—to whom it seems that all other books with his name upon their covers were written, and were very badly written, by somebody else. Yes, that last book, which he himself wrote, appears in its own little way to be well enough. But the writer's real interest and the real incentive of his continued living is that unfinished bit of phrase-shaping which he keeps yet in hand and on account of which he labors heart-breakingly (just as labors the fox hunter or the golf player) "because he likes to."

I believe that every other artist in every other field of esthetics is about his inconsequential play there for exactly the same reason. I believe that neither Mr. Schoen nor anybody else ought to gloss over this quite irrational liking, which I take to be the origin of all art, of all man-created beauty, and (as the uncivil may observe I have demonstrated) of considerable balderdash.

Medium Ævum, the organ of The Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages & Literature, was formally inaugurated recently in Oxford, England. It will be concerned with all matters touching the languages and literature of the Middle Ages. It is proposed to publish the three numbers of the current year in May, September, and December; subsequently, the months of issue will be February, June, and September. The number for May, 1932, contained the following articles, together with reviews and short notices:

Dante and the *regnum italicum*, by B. H. Sumner.

The Language of the First and Third Versions of Froissart's *Chronicles*, by F. S. Shears.

Late Old English Rune-Names, by C. L. Wrenn.



AMERICAN LANDSCAPE, BY L. WHITNEY
FROM "AMERICA AS AMERICANS SEE IT" (HARCOURT)

The National Soul

THE SOUL OF AMERICA. By ARTHUR HOSSON QUINN. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1932. \$3.

Reviewed by HELEN HILL

THERE is a certain fairly widespread aversion to attempted portraiture of national souls. Much of it is based upon the crudity or artistic failings of the majority of such efforts; upon the bill-poster brutality with which our war-time propagandists depicted the Enemy Soul in the darkest colors and the anæmic idealism with which our Fourth of July (not to say bi-centennial) orators suffuse the American soul with rosy hues. Some of it is based in addition upon a degree of agnosticism concerning the existence of such a soul, on a doubt as to whether a so-called national soul has more reality than any other statistical average. Bad art, however, is a condemnation not of art but of its makers. And few people who have followed the agenda of the post-war international conferences can close the record without belief (though perhaps not faith), in definitely differing national characteristics. Certainly Salvador de Madariaga, with "Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards," and "I. Americans" has profited by his opportunity for such observation.

Since the war, beginning with Siegfried's "America Comes of Age," the American soul has been discussed by a variety of different specialists, German industrialists, French visitors, English lecturers. It has also had several rather thorough examinations by Americans, outstandingly by Charles and Mary Beard in their "Rise of American Civilization" and by Parrington in his trilogy, "Main Currents in American Thought." Professor Quinn's book lies on the borderline between these two analyses. As might have been expected from authors who separately had written "The Economic Interpretation of the Constitution" and "A Short History of the American Labor Movement," the Beards look at America's development with a definitely economic eye. By contrast, Professor Quinn writes in his foreword, "without beauty there can be no soul for a nation . . . for merchant fleets of Phœnicia, there is an oblivion so deep that even the alphabet they carried past the pillars of Hercules cannot frame words to record it." He draws material from American economic experience, but he is interested in it only as showing the formation of certain qualities which he has selected as most characteristic of the American soul. This selection of qualities is what also differentiates the intention of his work from that of Parrington, who began simply with the writing left by the period he covered, and drew from it certain conclusions.

Professor Quinn first estimates the contributions to what is essentially and uniquely American which were made by the various races landing on her colonial shores. From the birth of the American soul in the open air of a new continental opportunity he follows its development

through the period of independence and the testing of the union down to its coming of age in the World War. Then looking at it in the light of today he sketches seven qualities as its outstanding characteristics: Democracy, Efficiency, Liberality, Provincialism, Individuality, Humor, Vision; his final conclusion is that America is "neither tory nor radical but the eternal liberal among the nations."

His development, through the historical chapters, of the countervailing influences that keep America's course in line with the middle of the road is well worth reading: his summary of the political struggles between the party of institutions and the party of personality takes many of its illustrations from the field of literature in which his specialty as authority on American drama makes him particularly at home, and represents a breach in the departmental walls usually erected in American universities between History 27 and Lit. 42.

His section on the seven American qualities is uneven and on the whole less satisfactory. Professor Quinn announces himself in his preface as a disillusioned optimist, who believes "that our apparent love of isolation has swept a steady current of liberal thinking which will lead us finally to the new internationalism that is the only hope of the world." His disillusion is obviously only adjectival; it comes out occasionally,—witness his discussion of education as affected by "efficiency,"—but more often he is the optimist, indulging in "a few words of cheer." His view of the historical forest through which we have come is well drawn; his perspective on the trees (and stumps) with which we are immediately surrounded seems at times a rather idealized picture. The strength and weakness of the book are both contained in the part on "Individuality." It opens with the following paragraph:

One of the usual mistakes in the consideration of Americans, especially by foreigners, is to speak of us as though we were all alike. Our democracy is presumed to have reduced us to complete uniformity, while, as a matter of fact, it has produced in some respects the most highly individualized race in the world's history.

That statement over, Professor Quinn goes on to an excellent survey of individuality in recent American drama.

Middlebury College is going to conduct again at Bread Loaf Inn, Bread Loaf, Vermont, its Writers' Conference, from August 17th to September first. These Conferences have been highly successful in the past. This year Margaret Widdemer, Walter Pritchard Eaton, Lee Wilson Dodd, Robert Hillyer, Bernard DeVoto, Gorham B. Munson, and Cornelia Meigs are going to offer courses, and various critics, novelists, poets, and editors of distinction will be visiting speakers. Bread Loaf is up on a shoulder of the Green Mountains where high thinking is not incompatible with very comfortable living.

Nunraw, in East Lothian, which is recognized as the "Ravenswood" of Sir Walter Scott's "Bride of Lammermoor," is shortly to come up for sale.