

AN ANALYSIS
OF
THE INFLUENCE OF THE DEPRESSION
UPON
AMERICAN LITERATURE
1929--1938

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GRACE NOTES IN THE LITERARY SYMPHONY--by way of an
Introduction.

Two hundred years from now, when subjects for Ph. D. theses will be even further to seek than they are to-day, when there will hardly be a minor poet, an obscure essayist, or an obscene fiction writer whose past has escaped these academic detectives, some university president will make a profound and startling announcement. It will be that his university considers contemporary literature really significant.

This dissertation is based on the general belief that serious study can be made of a country's literature at the time, or near the time, it appears. How often has it been said that literature is married to life, yet how too frequently we divorce them until the one is old and hoary with tradition, stooped with respectability, and palsied with textbook academics. Then the pair are "reunited" and we foolishly hope the union to be a fruitful one--to bear a progeny of dutiful solutions for our present day problem-children.

From deep in the American life come attitudes by way of its literature that reflect and mould the history of the nation. The country is like a great orchestra that speaks full throated the message of a symphony--

the romantic fiction of 'cellos and woodwinds, the poetry of strings, the factual brass and the propaganda of percussion. That we might add a few grace notes to this great modern literary symphony is the purpose of the thesis.

The research part of my work has been carried on for the best part of a year. It consisted of the usual reading of actual works and the few existing critical books on contemporary American literature and a fairly thorough search through back and current numbers of the literary periodicals--such as Saturday Review of Literature, New Republic, New York Times Book Review, New York Herald Tribune "Books", Book-of-the-Month Club News, Atlantic Monthly, Harpers', The American Mercury, Publisher's Weekly, and the files of various New York, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Toronto and Chicago newspapers' critical columns. That my work might have exact and authoritative bases on almost immediate criticism, a mailing list of some two hundred and thirty addresses was prepared. The group included about 150 English departments of all the major universities in Canada and the United States, editors of forty-five major publishing houses in the two countries, and some thirty-odd critics. There was a 60% response and

of those replies about 70% contained material that supported or threw some clarifying thought on my thesis.

The comments received were, for the most part, brief, but were surprisingly in agreement, although variable in interesting degrees. It was not my intention to reduce my thesis to a questionnaire-answer affair nor did those men and women who sent helpful answers take that attitude. A few, however, were caustic in their refusals to comment on the American literary scene since the depression. Many referred me to articles or books they had written which bore on the subject and to them I am exceedingly grateful.

It is my sincere hope that these few "grace notes" will contain some critical value, that contemporary American literature may be given a trifle more cause-and-effect than the average literateur is at present anxious to concede, and that a study of contemporary literature in any country may be shown to have a real importance--culturally and socially.

When we look back to the twenties, we have no difficulty in defining certain very characteristic and well-marked trends in our neighbours' literature.

That new trends are now manifesting themselves, and that they are violently opposed to those of the last decade, is also apparent; yet to define them is a difficult task. It is characteristic of the dawn of the preceding darkness, rather than a definable thing in itself.

One trend does seem to be shadowed with a certain degree of clarity: A NEW INTEREST IN THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN CULTURE. The writers of today are turning to the American scene not primarily because of regional colour, but because of a deep interest in the roots of their culture. The purpose of this new interest in all things American is that more than ever, Americans are looking to the future, seeking a social ideal of greater human justice, peace, and general security. It is reflected, as we shall see in more detail later, in the crude, and sometimes almost pathetic, efforts of the so-called proletarian writers, but it also appears in the more careful work of the older and established leaders in American letters. It is significant that O'Neill is doing a cycle of American plays dealing with an historical theme and based on a firm faith in democracy; Edna St. Vincent Millay turns from "Fatal Interview" to "Conversations at Midnight"; Dos Passos writes with

tragic scorn of the twenties and points to a new ideal; Hemingway's last novel, "To Have and Have Not", is admitted by all critics to indicate a new social interest, although whether or not the book itself is good will be decided later; Rice turns to the novel and pictures the confusion and decay of our present social structure, implying the need for a new order, but he does not specify what particular order it shall be; Sandburg's last work is a testimony to democracy and an implied call to consider it well before it is too late.

American literature is taking a positive attitude towards life, an attitude based upon a conviction that America has come of age.

But why bother making a study of contemporary American literature, some one may ask. We may grant the point that ^{it} is exceedingly difficult, under ordinary circumstances, to detect and analyse trends in any literature for the brief period of six or seven years. Many university professors argued this ~~point~~ with me in their letters, and one even went so far as to accuse me that, for this reason, my thesis was actually not a study in literature but in sociology. The occurrence of the depression, however, during the years prescribed for this survey, together

with the fact that American literature has always reflected, to an appreciable extent, the conditions of the economic world in which it has appeared, makes the tracing of these trends somewhat less difficult than would otherwise be the case.

Thus it may be asserted, with some degree of confidence, that the changes in the economic life of America have had a perceptible effect upon its literature; that there has been noticeable in this literature ever since the beginning of the '30's a growing sociological note, together with a further breaking-down, as far as the subject-matter is concerned, of the old traditions that were assailed so vigorously during the post-war^f period. In the novel and the short story particularly is there mirrored the growing self-consciousness that is apparent in the various strata of American society and that finds a voice in the protagonist of these literary forms, the labouring man, the union members or union official, the man on relief, to say nothing of the tramp, the "bum", the "down-and-out", chief characters in many novels and short stories.

How far have fundamental American attitudes been changed by the unrest of a critical period? What has

become of traditional American humanism? These are the broader implications of the problem of which this thesis is intended to treat.

THE AMERICAN NATION

The traditions and outlook of the American people, or for that matter of any people, should be given some study early in a critical analysis of the literature, especially of the United States, which has had a peculiar and mixed background and which now has emerged as one complex affair.

By reason of colonial heritage, the traditions and outlook of the United States are Anglo-Saxon. Conservative people, those in power socially, economically or politically, do not like to contemplate changes in institutions, and so they shut their eyes to altering conditions which may bring about changes. Up to the present the class in power in America has been what we call the "old Americans" and they have simply refused to look at other things in the picture which might be disturbing. Their traditional America is one in which the population, or that part of it which counts or should count (except to be exploited), is of British origin.

But actually, of the 123,000,000 total population of the country nearly 53,000,000 are divided among the foreign-born, the children of foreign-born, Negroes, Mexicans and other races. For those figures, I am

indebted to a recent article in the New York Times Magazine. America is evidently getting far from the myth of being an Anglo-Saxon nation. Of the foreign-born and of those with one or both parents foreign-born, an overwhelming proportion are from those nations, such as Italy, Germany, Russia, Poland and others, which have willingly adopted either dictatorships or the totalitarian State as their form of government. Furthermore, the United States has become fifty per cent urban and eighty per cent of the foreign-born live in cities. Farmers who used to be considered the backbone of America and formed about ninety per cent of the population now form only twenty-five to thirty per cent. So "Americanization" is by no means synonymous with "Anglo-Saxonization."

This means that in a country like the United States movements in its drama, literature and culture in general are bound to indicate the pulse-beat of the country itself. Furthermore, and here there lies a tinder-box that might become a menace, influential literature tainted with propaganda will be a serious menace and possibly freedom of speech itself might suffer in any corrective programme.

Let us review in a general way a little of our American history. The influence of the frontier was

surely a levelling process. All men had to work or starve; life was crude, hard and lonely. There was always free land ahead, and the ambitious, the adventurous, were always pushing farther out to a new frontier. This frontier bred a belief that any man could do any job if he was any good at all, because all who succeeded had to be Jacks-of-all-trades. It bred also egoism and democracy for each felt himself as good as the other and a little better. But it bred ignorance as well, because of hard work and lack of opportunity. If a man did not succeed in one place, he moved to another and the continent seemed boundless. Since the frontier bred narrow views and intolerance, a small community insisted on conformity. To be different was to be critical, it was assumed. The frontier bred dislike of privilege in any form. The law of life was frontier work and frontier success--hard and physical work.

There was neither time nor opportunity to enjoy literature or the arts, and, by a social law exemplified many times in history, what a class or group cannot enjoy comes to be disposed^{of} or condemned as sinful.

Another important factor at work on the American

character and outlook was the tremendous natural wealth of the continent.

The results of these and other factors have been:

- (1) a realistic American tradition which is quite different from that which the "old Americans still consider the true one".
- (2) a rugged individualism derived directly out of the frontier element.

The first and second frontier generations did not want the central government to interfere with them, but they did want it to make money for them. A further development of this over the whole country has resulted in sectionalism, or, so far as literature is concerned, regionalism. But one region might control another and we have many examples of how easily a large number of the American people can slip into controlling and regimenting another part if it suits them, regardless of the sentimental traditions of constitutional liberty, e. g., the treatment of the Negroes; prohibition; the second Ku Klux Klan movement; the reconstruction in the south after the Civil War, in which southern legislatures were controlled by northern carpet-baggers.

Professor Walter Prescott Webb in his new book,

"Divided We Stand: The Crisis of a Frontierless Democracy" brings out more clearly than here the three regional divisions and their implications--a North, a South and a West, each with geographical boundaries that can be defined with reasonable accuracy, and each with a fairly distinctive culture and way of life.

In the Civil War the North destroyed the military power of the South, Northern reconstruction destroyed its political power, and war and reconstruction between them reduced its economic ~~power~~ ^{power} to the vanishing point. The North lost its political control of the South after 1886, and the admission of New Mexico and Arizona as states, in 1912, marked the end of its political control of the West, but in the meantime it had built up an economic imperialism through which it has continued to dominate both sections. (Here I am paraphrasing Professor Webb's book; it is with this economic imperialism that the professor deals. ~~with~~). The influence of business corporations lies with the North and the real property of the South and West is "rapidly passing", through mortgage loans at high interest rates, into their hands. ~~Far~~ the larger part of the wealth of

the country, on the other hand, is in the West and South.

Now, I do not think these facts are irrelevant to a literary study. It serves to point out further the presence of regionalism in the national life. It confuses considerably more a study of the "national" literature, but, on the other hand, gives us an indication of what an aid to unity a national literature could be.

The American scene is further complicated by class divisions that are resented. This too derives from the old frontier days when ambition and striving really produced jealousy. In England, the situation is different. There the middle class do not resent the upper nobilities ^{so} ~~as~~ much--nor do the members attempt to get into the upper brackets. Neither does the lower labouring class feel obliged to be jealous of the middle class tradesmen. In the United States, class hatred is even encouraged by the Roosevelt administration. The very term "New Deal" itself suggests that the previous deal was a mistaken one, or, more likely, a wrongful one.

The depression has made these divergences more acute. Even before the government itself had done

anything about the situation, the literary forces had jumped into the front row from the somnolence of the twenties--ready to phrase the problems, to restate the situations, to offer solutions, or to offer escapes. Trends were bound to result for the literature was tied directly to the actual social life of the nation. A drought in the West, a strike in the East, a mine disaster in the North, and an exposé of share-cropper disgraces in the South changed the public's reading almost over night.

THE TWENTIES: "A LOST GENERATION"

At the door of the Great War can be laid, directly or indirectly, most of the problems of to-day. Even the mother problem, the Depression, is a development of it, as admitted by all social and economic leaders. But the thing that we want to bring to notice in this thesis is that two generally opposite literary responses were evoked by these two related crises. The years 1929 and 1930 act as literary watersheds and yet, the literature of the separate periods had many things in common.

For a concise and intimate account of American literary groups in the war and shocking readjustment period that followed the Armistice, one can read Malcolm Cowley's "Exiles' Return". Mr. Cowley is now editor-in-chief of the New Republic but in his book he suggests that whatever he owes as a competent present day critic he derives from a series of experiences in the war and the twenties. It is well then to listen to what he says and find out what happened between the War and the Depression. Perhaps the literary trends of the thirties will become clearer when we find out what went before.

Gertrude Stein has characterized the American war writers as a "Lost Generation". Mr. Cowley would define that, however, so as not to read--"hopelessly lost":

"After the War, they (the young writers who served overseas in Allied armies, Red Cross units, etc.) would all suffer the same emotional collapse: they would be left standing like someone who has just expelled a deep breath and feels no wish to take another. Nor would this be the end of their similar experiences. Till their thirtieth year, most of them would follow a geographical pattern of life, one that can be expressed briefly by the names of two cities and a state: New York, Paris and Connecticut. After living for a time in Greenwich Village they would move on toward Montparnasse, with its "suburbs" in Normandy and on the Riviera. Some of them would remain in what seemed a permanent exile, but the others would go back to New York, then somehow settle in a Connecticut farmhouse with their books, a portable typewriter and the best intentions. Whichever course they followed, most of them would have achieved by 1929, a fairly steady income and a place in the

literary world. Then, with the depression, they once more had imposed on them a common experience almost as catastrophic as the War."

Mr. Cowley speaks of the young men and women who were graduated from college, or might have been graduated, between 1916, roughly, and 1922. He mentions F. Scott Fitzgerald, who in 1920 wrote "This Side of Paradise", a bad novel but an honest one, E. C. Cummings, John Dos Passos with his "Three Soldiers", Edmund Wilson, Allen Tate, Matthew Josephson, Hart Crane, Hemingway, Wilder, Faulkner, and a host of others who tried to find a spiritual readjustment in the world of letters. At first, however, they only succeeded in carrying over their own emotional upsets into their writing. But from 1921 until 1929 definite progress was made away^{from} the Bohemianism of their "exile" philosophies toward something positive. By 1929 the generation was established with its novelists, poets, critics, biographers, a full array of talent. Among these writers, such as Kay Boyle, Archibald MacLeish (a few years older, but still affiliated with this generation), Louis Bromfield (who vulgarized its ideas), a general high level of craftsmanship and integrity prevailed.

Van Wyck Brooks had written in 1921 that:

"The blighted career, the arrested career, the diverted career are, with us, the rule.

The chronic state of our literature is that of a youthful promise which is never redeemed."

But all that seemed to have changed. Apparently American literature had succeeded in acquiring two things it had lacked: a sound body and a continuing tradition.

"Yet", says Mr. Cowley, "in spite of its achievements the Lost Generation still merited the adjective that Gertrude Stein applied to it. It was lost, first of all, because it was uprooted, schooled away, almost wrenched away, from its attachment to any region or tradition. Secondly, its training had prepared ~~it~~ for another world than existed after the War (and the War prepared it for nothing). Thirdly, because it chose to live in exile. Fourthly, because it had no trustworthy guides, and had formed for itself only the vaguest picture of society and the writer's place in it. The generation belonged to a period of confused transition from values already fixed to values that had to be created. Its members contributed their earliest work to magazines with names like Transition, Broom (to make a clean sweep of it), 1924, This Quarter (existing in the pure

present), Secession."

This group, then, in seceding from the old could adhere to nothing new. It was a negative trend in the country's literary tradition. For a time they thought they had something in the religion of pure and purposeless art which had comforted the most skeptical of their predecessors; but this too had to be abandoned. Their books were almost all themes of loneliness, full of a desire to recapture some faint memory.

"In Paris or Pamplona, writing, drinking, watching bull fights or making love, they continued to desire a Kentucky hill cabin, a farmhouse in Iowa or Wisconsin, the upper Michigan woods, the blue Juniata, a country they had 'lost, ah, lost', the home to which they couldn't go back again ever."

Soon there was a time, beginning about 1925, when it was suddenly profitable to write novels and biographies. It seemed that everybody, according to Mr. Cowley, was living on publishers' advances, sometimes \$100 a month for an extended period, sometimes \$300 or \$500 in a flat sum, toward the writing of a book that might or might not eventually be finished. Most of the books financed by publishers were not worth writing at all, but some of them were

good and a few were enormously successful--the man you had seen every night eating spaghetti at the next table in a cheap Italian restaurant, and thinking about the prices before he ordered dessert or a glass of red wine, would suddenly disappear, would be snatched away into a flood-lighted world of press interviews, trips by airplane to Hollywood, sunbasking on the Riviera, *for a* well-advertised book that regularly appeared on best-seller lists. Literature in those days could also be a profitable business; even among Rotarians one didn't have to be ashamed any longer of saying that one was a writer.

But in America there was a group that did not regard the Lost Generation's efforts, even the admirable ones, any too highly. This is what Harry Hansen, Literary Critic of the New York World-Telegram, reminds me of in his letter on this thesis. He says:

"Just before the depression came America had experienced ten or more years of robust writing, led by Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser among the men and Willa Cather among the women. The dominant group was sympathetic with the social criticism of Henry L. Mencken

and attacked Puritanism, mediocrity (the lost generation) and that phase of go-getter business optimism (a heritage of the frontier and Andrew Carnegie) to which Sinclair Lewis, by his novel 'Babbitt', gave the name of babbitttry. Miss Cather also incorporated the lessons of Freudian psychology, which was traceable in the writings of Floyd ~~S~~^T Bell and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Writers about ten years younger, who had taken part in the War and were nearing the thirties, were antipathetic to this domination and supported the experiments of James Joyce and the drastic criticism of T. S. Eliot in his "Waste Land" stage. They had been groping for realities and were ready for something concrete when the depression arrived."

Mr. Cowley also shows that, as the time of the depression neared, his group were becoming more serious, harder working, more soulful in its dissipations and above all more fruitful. The era was beginning to produce fine novels and poems.

"It had been an easy, quick, adventurous age, good to be young in; and yet on coming out of it one feels a sense of relief, as on coming out of a closed, smoky room, too full of talk and

people, into the sunlight of the winter streets."

It took about a year after the stock-market crash to change over the literary programme, as Mr. Hansen tells me. In 1930 one wing of the writers of the twenties embraced the humanistic doctrines of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More (not new, but finding new disciples, partly because Eliot had interpreted some of Babbitt's ideas on dualism and was turning toward religion). There were also converts to the Thomist movement, but without influence. The seriousness of the depression turned the thought of everyone toward social remedies and immediately eclipsed all discussion of writing for its own sake.

To see just how far we have come in social, moral and political aspects from those in vogue following the war and throughout the twenties, we have only to read books like Frederick Lewis Allen's "Only Yesterday". It is sprightly, panoramic, and devoted to the post-war years and becomes particularly interesting because in it the near past assumes an air of already having receded into history. Was it really only so short time ago that we were shaking dubious heads over a generation that bobbed its hair, discarded chaperones, and berated its elders? Was it only yesterday that cocktail parties superseded

teas, and that Sinclair Lewis gave the small town a black eye, and that Lindbergh flew the Atlantic? How much have Hitler and Mussolini done since those days! Although Mr. Allen wrote in 1931, well around the corner from prosperity, he gives, on the whole, a cheerful picture of rising prosperity, perhaps to offset the actuality of the case.

Another good book for a portrayal of living conditions before the crash and of what followed upon it is "The Years of the Locust" by Gilbert Seldes. Fred J. Ringel's "America As Americans See It" also gives a bird's-eye view of life in the United States in its various phases in the post-war years. Politics, amusements and arts are covered by Edwin C. Hill in "The American Scene", and for a good encyclopaedia of reference of the post-war years we have the "Recent Social Trends in the United States". It embodies the findings of President Hoover's research committee on social trends.

Now, the job for us is to find out whether the depression was really a fortunate one for American literature in bringing it down from up a blind alley, and then injecting new philosophies and forces into the country's literary glands, or whether it was a plague that killed off or maimed the youthful achievement so promising in the last twenties.

AFTER THE CRASH

Was American literature sold short in 1930 along with other of the nation's assets? Certainly, the market debacle meant the demarcation line between the literature of the period under study and the literature of the twenties. The far-reaching qualities of an economic depression that turns its creative and cultural sources into entirely new channels makes it comparable, to a degree, with the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution to my mind.

Francis Brown, a leading critic for the New York Times Book Review magazine, writes me concerning the importance of the depression as a period for literary study:

"In the first place, I think it is fair to assume that everyone who writes a book does so because he thinks he has something to say. The critics may feel that perhaps it was not worth saying, or should have been left unsaid, but that is somewhat beside the point. Obviously, a writer is affected somewhat by his environment, some men more, some less, but none escape. The effects are apparent in much

that is being written to-day.

"Still, I think it dangerous to push the influence of environment too far. Recently there have been many American historical novels. Why? I can't tell. Except as they offer a degree of escape from present-day unpleasantness, they seem unrelated to our world with its clashing ideologies, its search for personal security and so forth. And except as the historical novel may deal with situations which a generation ago would not have been regarded as 'nice', I can't see that these books are much different from their predecessors, even though Margaret Mitchell and Winston Churchill may seem very far apart.

"On the other hand, of course, a great mass of recent fiction has a definite relationship with the present day. The so-called proletarian novel is unquestionably a product of the current interest in Marxism, the hard times, the apparent hopelessness which many see in the future. The Farrell-Halper-Gold school would have had a much harder time finding a public, I suspect, had not social currents borne a public to them."

Except for the vagueness as to the historical novel

he has mentioned here and which will be dealt with later in my work, I find support in Mr. Brown's letter.

Mr. E. Harman of the Editorial Department of the Oxford University Press also agrees that 1929 marks the beginning of the greatest single cultural influence in American history, aside from all economic and social phases. In Vernon Loggins' new "I Hear America" it is pointed out that following 1929 the despair and pessimism which characterized literature in the twenties had been placed by resignation, and yet the latter was not a further stage of the previous trend but a new one.

Leonard Broun of the Department of English in Syracuse University tells me that his university has viewed 1929 as significant enough to change the offerings of their English courses in that light. Odets, for example, has been included in the drama, Auden, Spender, Lewis, MacNiece, Rukeyser in the poetry, DosPassos, Malraux, Cantwell and others in the novel. Not all of these writers are American but they represent the changes in writing of recent date. Mr. Broun believes that the most recent vigorous literary work has been done on the so-called Left; "even older men like Sinclair Lewis and Hemingway

have moved somewhat in that direction in recent books".

Let us see just what the economic upset brought immediately. Almost within the first half of 1930 social objectives were preached by writers; economists came forth with volumes suggesting Utopianism, planning, revolution and communism. Among the radical critics (Nation, New Republic, New Masses, Modern Monthly, etc.), there developed a taste for literary planning as well, with "Marxian dialectic" on every tongue and all the dominating writers of the 1920's attacked as "bourgeois". Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Joseph Freeman, V. F. Calverton, Lewis Mumford, and many others wrote on this subject, but soon "deviations" of all kinds split their ranks. Wilson, the critic, and Dreiser, the novelist, found themselves unable to gain membership in the Communist party, which distrusted intellectuals. Soon thereafter writing again became independent, but traces of the Marxian interpretation lingered well into 1936-7, as Malcolm Cowley's "After the Genteel Tradition" shows us. Thereupon certain tendencies became clear--proletarian movement, escape literature, etc.--but these will be treated later in this thesis.

Not all critical and professorial opinion, however, is unanimous that the depression has been a welcome influence upon American literature. For instance, Professor Harlan W. Hamilton of the University of Akron believes that American writing since the onset of the depression has been "as confused as American thinking generally". It is not, he says, that Americans have lost their confidence in literary values, but rather that they have been made brutally aware of a shake-up in the subject-matter of literature--that is, man's relationship to man. The man of letters is commonly one of the very real social sympathies, though he may be quite unfitted to deal with the intellectual problems of the "social sciences". The depression, therefore, threw him into a painful dilemma. Should he permit his emotions to upset his judgment and, in a frenzy of pity, ^{should} ~~shall~~ he write uniformed novels of social protest? Or, recognizing his intellectual limitations, should he throw himself into research, abandon literature for economics, sociology, or political science, and, using the lecture platform, the newspaper column, or the political forum seek to bring about the better social order?

Few writers, it seems to Professor Hamilton, have as yet succeeded in giving anything which is both well-grounded literature and well-grounded social protest. But of one thing he feels certain--there can be no return to any literary status quo. If Dos Passos and Halper are not suggesting a way to resolve the difficulties, the only alternative he sees is in flight into symbolist incommunicado isolation. "God help us if that's the answer."

From this pessimistic view, we turn to that of Professor Frederic Klees of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa. Without denying the despair in American literature as a result of the depression, he can see a beneficial process of purification. In a talk he gave last fall he outlined "The Certainty of Despair" as applied to his country's literature. Mr. Klees pointed out that in the United States there is a heritage of pessimism, although the American people are basically optimistic. The pessimism of modern American authors he ascribes to the "blows of the World War and its consequences".

"It is such awful blows as the World War destruction, the greed as exhibited in the Teapot

Dome scandal, the manipulations leading to the 1929 market crash, and the growth of dictatorships which are responsible for pessimism in writers. It has destroyed their faith", says Mr. Spiller.

The escapists' school which sprang up after the war was sterile. Their emphasis on art for art's sake in an effort to avoid reality was not the answer accepted by American writers. T. S. Eliot, who faced the world as the escapists did not, was a poet who expressed the futility which men felt after the war. Robinson Jeffers too is a great pessimist; however, he overuses horror symbols so much that he arouses the sense of caricature in people and allows them some escape from the total negation of hope.

Eugene O'Neill is the gloomiest of American dramatists, but there is little despair in his plays. You feel that the accidents of many of his plays happen only to peculiar people in peculiar places, and thereby escape despair. Furthermore, "Days Without End" is an answer in neon lights to modern despair.

Professor Edward Wagenknecht of the University of Washington writes me that he believes 1929 brought a distinct return to sanity in American literature.

As proof he states that the pseudo-emancipation of the twenties and its more freakish types of experimentation have now pretty well played themselves out. This is the same thesis held by Irene and Allen Cleaton in their "Books and Battles".

"The change appears in the return of the historical, romantic, and fantastic novels," points out Dr. Wagenknecht. "These were comparatively few during the twenties; today it pretty nearly keeps one man busy reading them."

It is true that many of the "sophisticated" writers of the twenties are already definitely "out". Carl Van Vechten will never write another novel. Hergesheimer will not write many. The Cabell "boon" has collapsed utterly and Sherwood Anderson has lost ground. Judging from the savage reception accorded Ernest Hemingway's new novel, Professor Wagenknecht believes he too is definitely on the downgrade in public favour.

One clear indication that the crash brought or restored some finer elements to America is the evidence of fantasy since 1929. Fantasy is a prime element in Robert Nathan's stock-in-trade. Nathan wrote clear through the twenties--to a very restricted audience. To-day he enjoys large scales. Both his

"One More Spring" and the latest "Winter in April" surpass in charm, in wit, in irony, in universal appeal, anything any of his imitators have yet written. "Winter in April" is a simple story of youth and age in the world to-day, each feeling sorry for the other. The old scholar, his young granddaughter.....to meet them is to know them, and love them. And through them, Mr. Nathan gives us a view of, and faith in, life that will long be remembered.

During the twenties, Booth Tarkington enjoyed a fairly good sale because he wrote for the sentimental quarter of the teen-aged. To-day it is a good sign that he is a general best-seller. Take for instance Tarkington's latest "Rumbin Galleries". A cracking good story told in the author's characteristic style of sparkling wit and heart-warming humour, the book has all the elements of sheer entertainment one would desire in a work of light fiction. Mr. Tarkington is himself a connoisseur and collector of old masters and has a fund of personal experience in the art world which must have made the writing of this novel, treating so largely of dealer wiles and collector vagaries, an undertaking of special relish. In Mr. Rumbin of

Rumbin Galleries he has portrayed a character whose original doubtless flourishes in New York art circles--a dealer who reserves his sharp practice for business rivals while observing toward his customers not merely an honest but a highly ethical attitude. The romantic interest centers on the fortunes of a poor but very honourable young man who enters the business of art and antique selling as ignorant of its complexities as a newborn babe.

Even writers like Michael Fessier ("Fully Dressed and in his Right Mind") and Lawrence Edward Watkin ("On Borrowed Time")--who are certainly not idealistic in general temperament--find it advisable to imitate Nathan and Tarkington.

A French writer, Robert Francis, (who was trained in mathematics) has manifested a more dazzling talent along this line than any American. "The Wolf at the Door" was not a success in America, but it and its successors are very popular in France. I mention this here because it seems to show that this reaction against naturalism and extreme realism is not confined to the United States.

Willa Cather, also, who never went a-whoring after strange gods, holds her position and extends her audience steadily. Elizabeth Madox Roberts may

have lost somewhat, but if so, I think the obscurity of her last book, "He Sent Forth A Raven" was the sole cause. She will probably regain lost ground with her next book.

In other fields, the same tendencies appear in the decline of such critics as H. L. Mencken and the gradual disappearance of biographies given up primarily to "debunking" people.

None of this means that we are going back to mid-Victorian standards. "Anthony Adverse" itself has passages that could never have been printed in America twenty years ago. What I am trying to show is that if American literature had continued along the line of the twenties it had nothing to gain and all to lose. The thirties brought mistakes but the depression injected vitalities that, I believe, will be profoundly enjoyed. The new idealism in fiction, if there is such a thing, differs from the old in that it is not based on evasion. One might even say that Americans have revolted against realism because it left out too much of reality.

I have noticed that many critics refer to Josephine Johnson as one of the most important writers that has so far appeared in the country during the thirties. She is not a romanticist, but

she is distinctly an idealist. She has written only two novels so far, but they are books of extraordinary achievement for so young a writer and therefore of extraordinary promise. She could be ranked with the six most important American women writers of the twentieth century thus far. Ellen Glasgow, Edith Wharton, and Mary Johnston appeared at the beginning of the century. Willa Cather joined them about 1912, Elizabeth Madox Roberts in 1925, and Josephine Johnston in 1934.

It might be argued that the gradual disappearance of Thornton Wilder works ("The Bridge of San Luis Rey") against my thesis. I don't think it does. I think Wilder is disappearing because, although he ranks with the idealists, he really had very little to say and now has finished saying it. His last book was a disastrous experiment, and he did not help matters by making himself press-agent for Gertrude Stein.

PROLETARIANISM

Since the depression was primarily an economic upheaval the class to first feel its effects was the proletarian group. The immediate trend in literature thereupon was one of revolt and a presentation of the case for those who suffered most. The proletarian movement of authors, in small magazines and books, was well under way within a year of the stock-market crash. It emphasized the poor, the poverty-stricken, the industrially unemployed, and then in 1931 it became personified in "the forgotten man". Harry Hansen of the New York World-Telegram says that this is an important trend historically, and perhaps socially, "but no great novel has come out of the cauldron."

John S. Davenport of the University of Tennessee also believes that proletarianism must be studied as a phase of recognition of the social and economic changes and movements of the period under study. "Certainly our magazine, non-fiction articles and short stories", he writes, "consider man in relation to his environment and in connection with the problem of making a living." But Mr. Davenport is much more charitable than Mr. Hansen in his

opinions upon the products of this trend. Plays like Anderson's "Winterset" and Kingsley's "Dead End" exemplify the movement to put ^{forward} the seamier side of life and draw the attention of the public to the problem presented in them. However, there is a certain amount of fine artistry in those productions as well, believes Mr. Davenport.

Against that Professor Lawrence E. Watkin of Washington and Lee University writes that he believes proletarianism has thrown American literature into a "futility pocket" in which American writers still are. The novelist placidly accepts the philosophy of the naturalists and realists that the hopeless, helpless, spineless middle-class or lower-class hero is the best subject for psychological "study". Like Mr. Hansen, Dr. Watkin believes that the flood of "pioneer tradition" novels suggest America is growing sick of that ideal. If that thesis is so, it is an additional approach to the historical novel and escape literature that we must discuss later. Henry Seidel Canby, lecturer in English at Yale, in his article "The Threatening Thirties" (Saturday Review of Literature) has the same deprecating opinion of proletarian literature. Fortunately, the public have never taken to the trend with any great enthusiasm and by now it is fairly well spent. As

evidence, Mr. Canby points out that Hemingway's "To Have and Have Not", proletarian only to a degree, is not getting such a good hand.

Carl van Doren, the eminent American critic, has summed up his views of American literature in the English edition of his "What Is American Literature?" He sees proletarianism in some form colouring directly or indirectly all the literature of the thirties. "The developments since 1935", he writes in a letter, "have not particularly changed my opinions, except that I notice a falling off in the use of the term 'proletarian novel', which has already come to seem a little out of date. In the face of fascism, the left wing talks more of democracy and less of communism and proletarianism."

Jay B. Hubbell, editor of the American Literature, a publication of Duke University, also believes that with the passing of the depression there has been "a noticeable decrease in the popularity of left-wing writings." He is inclined to also think that public taste in fiction is turning away from the kind of realism or naturalism practiced by Hemingway, Faulkner and others. Professor W. F. Tamblyn of the University of Western Ontario also makes the main point of his letter the fostering of

the proletarian type of drama and novel by the depression.

But of all the letters I received to questions on American literary trends, perhaps the one from Professor Margaret Beede of the University of North Dakota gave the best evaluation of proletarian literature:

"It seems, then, that there is a definite sociological trend noticeable in the American literature of to-day, this, undoubtedly, one result of the depression and the economic chaos accompanying it. Many writers are seeking, through literature, some sort of social unity or synthesis, with special attention being paid by many to the 'forgotten man'. This literature has been, and will continue to be, successful if and when the artistic qualities of it outweigh any element of propaganda, the latter being, in some of this type of work, too strong and overshadowing the aesthetic interest. There are those writers who feel that any absorption into the social and economic problems of the day is justified provided that the literary results contain less of reporting and more of interpreting. There is also, finally, the literature

of escape, which is often an indirect protest
(both) against the conditions of the time and that
literature which reflects those conditions."

This leads us then to a closer examination of
the proletarian literature of our period and to some
evaluation of it from the standpoint of literary
contributions. Comparisons should also be drawn
with similar literature of other periods and coun-
tries. Proletarian literature has many sub-headings
under which it could be examined in some detail, for
examples, writings of industry, literature of the
soil, and the literature of revolt as a whole. Re-
volt really came into the open in recent American
literature after the war when the disgruntled youth
of the country began pouring out its disillusionment
in such books as Scott Fitzgerald's "This Side of
Paradise", John Dos Passos' "Three Soldiers", Ernest
Hemingway's stories and novels, Floyd Dell's "Moon
Calf", and Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio".
Anderson was older than most of the rest of the
disillusioned, but he was quite as much in revolt as
they. Of course, first and foremost in the attack
on smugness of American life was Sinclair Lewis with
"Main Street" which loosed a flood of derogatory

characterizations of the United States. Much of the moral revolt is to be found in such novels as the foregoing. They worked off the first emotional protest of the intelligentsia against untoward conditions, and inevitably after a time lost their impetus.

But it was the depression that brought such viciousness to the literature of revolt that it made Sherwood Anderson's "Marching Men" of 1917 and Upton Sinclair's "Oil" of 1927 appear but mild protests. Throughout the thirties we have had a never-ending line of novels in the proletarian vein. "Union Square" by Albert Halper shows the foreign labourer at conflict with or at work in the land of his adoption. We get detailed accounts of the gathering of New York workers and the reflection of unrest on the part of the dispossessed. In "To Make My Bread" Grace Lampkin portrays the industrial disturbances in the South and uses a Georgia mill strike for background. Walter Greenwood put an original romantic touch to "Love On The Dole". Mary Heaton Vorse wrote "Strike" and Fielding Burke "A Stone Came Rolling" and "Call Home The Heart". Catherine Brody's "Nobody Starves" is characteristically satirical and shows

the struggle of her characters against adversity and the lack of work in the motor-city Detroit. Jack Conroy in "The Disinherited" depicts labour in coal mine and factory, while Erskine Caldwell, who began as a regionalist and then turned proletarian, has concentrated upon a machine shop in "Land of Plenty". Clara Weatherwax's "Marching! Marching!" won the John Day--New Masses prize. It plays in a lumber town on the Pacific coast.

For a bird's-eye view of contemporary proletarian literature, one should read the illuminating anthology edited by Granville Hicks and others entitled "Proletarian Literature in the United States". It mentions the outstanding practitioners of this type of work and it is prefaced with a critical introduction by Joseph Freeman. Another single volume that covers the changing American scene as shown in the literature is Mauritz Hallgreen's "Seeds of Revolt". It is interesting and enlightening as a study of American life and the temper of the American people during the depression. Furthermore, it is not too pessimistic in tone despite the open-eyed method of attack. Of course, the last seven or eight years have brought forward many economic and social texts with the proletarian bias. I do not

feel they should be listed here, so I only mention those that met with a comparatively popular reception. In "A New Deal" Stuart Chase, the celebrated economist, presented an argument for economic planning under the direction of technologists. Charles A. Beard made a collection of articles by authors of note and entitled it "America Faces The Future", while Secretary of Agriculture Wallace set forth the ideals and faith of the Roosevelt administration in "New Frontiers" and "Whose Constitution?" On the other side, Alfred M. Bingham and Selden Rodman as editors compiled a study of the general welfare and called it "A Challenge to the New Deal". Herein they present the opinions of thirty-five well-known radicals on American problems.

Another phase of proletarianism is the constantly growing stream of novels dealing with the land and agricultural life. In 1935 the Pulitzer Prize for fiction was given to such a story, "Honey in the Moon" by H. L. Davis, a tale of pioneer Oregon. Caroline Miller's "Lamb in his Bosom" is a portrayal of elemental passions and simple people in the Georgia country. An earlier and still more popular one was in 1933, "As The Earth Turns" by Gladys Hasty Carroll, a story of Maine farm life and

background. In the same year, Kinnan Rawling's "South Moon Under" depicted the unfamiliar Florida scrub country. Both of the above have backgrounds pictured with liveliness and veracity, well differentiated and vigorously drawn characters, and both are knit into effectiveness by the understanding and sympathy of their authors for the manner of life they are portraying.

In 1932 Phil Stong wrote "State Fair", a best seller which gave the amusing side of country life. However, one could hardly term it a "novel of the soil". The next year James Gould Cozzens wrote "The Last Adam", a realistic and at the same time humorous portrayal of Connecticut village life, with some boldly etched personalities and a cleverly contrived method of securing unity for a necessarily sprawling story. But neither could this be called protest literature. Louis Bromfield's "The Farm" comes nearer to being included under the title, although it too preaches but mildly. It is really the biography of a family, disguised as fiction, with the author himself in the third person. It is a fascinating volume and worthy to take its place with Hamlin Garland's "A Son of the Middle Border". In "The Bartered Lady" by Evelyn Harris we have the autobiographical record

of a woman farmer, who, left without her husband and with children to educate, wrested her living from the soil.

The novel of the soil has long been a favourite in Europe, but it is only within recent years that it has risen to importance in America. When it arrived there, it arrived with a bang, and for the past decade has increasingly usurped attention. Yet even now, the farm has not had the epic treatment which it gets in such works as Knut Hansun's "Growth of the Soil", in the novels of Thomas Hardy, or in Reymont's "The Peasants", which a few years ago carried off the Nobel Prize for literature. In Great Britain excellent literary works of the soil are Eden Phillpott's "The Good Red Earth" and "Children of the Mist" and Shiela Kaye-Smith's "Sussex Gorse" and "Joanna Godden". I believe much of their superiority over the average American of the same type is because of less insistence on preaching a cause for the sake of the cause. Even Pearl Buck's "The Good Earth" holds attention and stirs emotion by the universality of its interest and of the experience it depicts. There is a Thomas Hardyian quality in her treatment of the land not just as background but as a thematic approach to the understanding of the narrative and characters.

A few American writers, before the depression writers of the soil, have achieved this universality. One of the earliest to command recognition in America was Hamlin Garland in his "Prairie Folk" and "Rose of Dutcher's Cooley". These were tales of the prairie in which the author no longer, as the earlier romancers had done, glossed over the monotony and frequent sordidness of country life. But Garland was violently decried at the time his novel appeared for naturalistic approach. Now we're convinced that the life of the farmer is not all beer and skittles. One novelist after another depicts the struggle with the elements, with poverty, with solitude--that is the lot of the tillers of the soil. Willa Cather's "O Pioneers" has an epic quality that offsets starkness of episode, and Ellen Glasgow's "Barren Ground" strikes a valiant note that lifts it above the drabness of life it makes no attempt to conceal. The most artistic novel of farm life is Edith Wharton's "Ethan Frome". In the others, the story usually suffers by propaganda and none have come out of the depression with sufficient inspiration to offset it.

Let us take the very recent "I Was A Share-Cropper" by Harry Harrison Kroll as a case in point. This is an interesting and amazing book about a

share-cropper's family tied to the earth by toil, and of their constant wanderings to find better landowners for whom to work in the West Tennessee lowlands. True, one becomes engrossed in their desperate condition and fascinated by the unfolding of the elementary characters. By sheer, straight, good "reporting" the author has brought into clear focus their gnawing hunger, hopeless and unsuccessful endeavour, during his youth, to escape poverty and periods of starvation. On the other hand, the story seems tied to one problem of American farming. There is no universality in the emotions expressed, such as one finds in "The Good Earth" for instance. Kroll is preaching against the share-cropping system and every literary and novel device he can handle he will use in his sermons.

Similarly the industrial books in the proletarian trend, those by Halper, Brody, Faulkner and Cantwell, miss by having too narrow or patchy a canvas. Perhaps Arnold Bennett can be accused of the same fault in his weakest spots. Here again our only proper method of evaluation is by comparison. Let us see, for instance, how closely a book by Halper matches Emile Zola's "Germinal", the novel of the coal miners of France, which many believe is still the greatest

of proletarian novels. Or we might take Zola's "Paris", Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables", Dicken's "Oliver Twist", Maxim Gorky's "Creatures That Once Were Men", Arnold Bennett's "Riceyman's Steps", and "Clayhanger", or the German contemporary Hans Fallada's "Little Man, What Now?" All of those preached a propaganda that was good for all times. What has Albert Halper done in his latest, "The Chute?"

"The Chute" is a sociological novel of love and work and play in a big Chicago mail-order house. The talented young American who, in "Union Square" and "The Foundry", depicted many lives, in his new novel focusses on a boy and girl highlighted against masses of humanity. Out of their hopes, tragedies and love, Halper has created his most personal and dramatic new novel. Along with the entire school of realists who have grouped themselves around the proletarian banner, he is committed to the assumption that a man is a passive thing, acted upon rather than acting. From this assumption, which submerges man in the disorder and chaos of the material universe and grants him no measure of control whatsoever over nature or over his own destiny, it is but a step to forgetting humanity altogether. Mr. Halper has come perilously close to taking this last step; his novels,

"Union Square", "The Foundry", and, now "The Chute", are primarily the descriptions of the operation of commercial enterprises; only secondly do they reveal what happens to the human beings who become enveloped in these enterprises.

There is sincerity in what Mr. Halper has done, and much of value. He honestly feels that man's fate is no longer within man's hands, that the system crushes the individual.

My quarrel is not with his philosophy. But if he wishes to continue to write novels, he cannot rest with mere descriptions of the system. The novel, basically, whatever form it may take, is an instrument for the communication and comparison of experience. Hence, unless it is a guide to action, it is nothing. Mr. Halper has shirked the moral implications of his theme.

His fundamental mood is one of naive perplexity and awe before the machines that have enslaved humanity. Here it is "the chute" at which he gapes--the great, noisy, voracious slide that spirals through many floors of the Golden Rule Mail-Order Company. Paul Sussman, the most important character in the novel, gives up his dream of becoming an architect because of the poverty of his family,

and takes a job as an order-picker in the men's clothing department. For \$12 a week he dashes furiously about, nine hours and more a day, matching orders from the desk, racing through shelf-lined aisles, "picking" the exact merchandise off the shelves, and rushing it to the checkers and wrappers at a closely specified moment, so that items from various departments can be assembled at the foot of the chute to complete multiple-item orders. The work has much the same nerve-racking pace as a job on a conveyor belt in an automobile factory, and the din from morning till night is infernal.

The endless details of the business may fill many of the 558 closely printed pages. And yet the total effect is less impressive than the description of the shoe factory in "Sister Carrie", of coal mining in "Germinal", or of a motor plant in "Men of Good Will". Why this lesser effectiveness in the face of the obviously accurate and exhaustive information which Mr. Halper has accumulated? Simply because the human mind rebels against such an accumulation of detail. In our own lives some things become meaningful and important to us; other things we forget. We expect of a novelist this same simplification, this same transfiguration of

experience into symbol. For we pattern our myths, our morals, our behaviour, on symbols.

When we are finished with the book, we know that Paul and all the many other characters whom Halper pours into his noisy inferno are crushed. We know it, but we don't believe it. We don't believe that Paul would have sacrificed his six-dollars-a-week job with an architect any more than Mr. Halper himself could have failed to quit a similar job to become a novelist. We don't believe that of all the employees of the Golden Rule Company, only Mangan, the hard-drinking ex-athlete, floor boss of Department 2, should escape. We don't believe that Myerson, the buyer, would fall into the trap that his superiors set for him, or that Eve Liebman, a checker, would commit suicide. Of course, we know that these things happen, that human beings are thus crushed by the system; but we cannot believe in or understand characters who do not struggle against the crushing, whether the struggle takes the form of individual or of mass action. It is true that Halper describes a feeble and abortive attempt of the workers to organize, and the espionage methods used by the company to drive out the union; but he soon returns to the business

methods of the company, showing how it established retail outlets to compete with bigger companies, how it overexpands, contracts bank loans and finally is taken over by two large mail-order houses.

One feels that all this is but a prelude, a preliminary stage setting. What happened to Paul, to Sidell, to Mangan, to Miss Dawson, to Mr. Shumway, to Mrs. Quirt, to big, jovial Bill Dorpat and Joey Applebaum, the boss's stool-pigeon, after the collapse? Halper does not say. His human beings do not matter to him. He has told the full story-- of the Golden Rule Mail-Order Company.

And what has been said above of Halper's novel can be said generally of the recent proletarian trend in American literature. The preaching of propaganda destroys the artistic qualities usually and an entangling mass of social machinery with endless detail prevents any universal philosophy or life symbols being presented convincingly.

We might take another recent novel that points an accusing finger, but not too directly, at the social structure. It is the "Imperial City" by Elmer Rice. This is an oversized, leisurely, undramatic novel from the author of such tightly made plays as "Counsellor-at-Law" and "Street Scene"--a

lavish portrait of New York which encompasses its seamy and saffron sides. New York is the town of the world that Mr. Rice professes to love, and if, in its imperial aspects, it reminds him a little of Babylon before the fall, he does not labour the comparison. The story--or rather the episodic scene--is built up around the complex social and financial life of the economic imperialists, the Colemans, who own a great Wall Street banking house. The queen mother of this monarchical line is Fannie Coleman, a former actress and world beauty. She has dined and danced and floated through the upper structure of society to the steady popping of champagne corks. At the opening of the story the family has met with a psychiatrist, a legal adviser and intimate friends to discuss the disposition of the now hopelessly dipsomaniacal Fannie. In the marked degeneration of the Coleman Clan Mr. Rice indicts indirectly the social structure which produced them, although no class thesis or social argument is externally imposed upon the writing. What is lacking, however, is a sense of imaginative warmth and colour. It is too much spectacle and too little feeling.

What then should be the province of the novel in an age of stress? This is a difficult question

to answer when one makes some study of American proletarian literature, which, I believe, has failed both in doctrine and purpose as well as in form. But we cannot let it go at that. Some attempt should be made to define the real function of the novel in an age of stress, to determine its usefulness in conveying what is real in experience, what is purposeful in thought. Unfortunately, a large branch of the present-day critical attitude towards fiction is intensely social-minded. There is a greater concern in the end with what writing has to express than with how it expresses it. However, there are the literary essentials--FORM and STYLE--without which human essentials can never be successfully projected. If properly employed, they are functional, not ornamental.

Should we give the highest praise to novelists who have brought most to bear on the social scene or to novelists who have brought most to light on human character--Fielding and Dickens or Jane Austen, Thackeray or Dostoevsky and Proust?

Don't suppose that the revolutionary novel must be based upon any out-and-out revolutionary subject-matter. The field extends far beyond strikes or proletarian characters. To write fiction where the

dice are loaded, where the people are simply mouth-pieces for a cause, where the plot is exaggerated on the one hand by melodrama ("Dead End"), on the other hand by inhumanity ("The Chute"), is hardly to have begun to understand the real purpose of revolutionary fiction. Subject-matter, considered in that way, has nothing to do with the case.

No more, narrowly speaking, has an overt point of view. What all critics who have both a feeling for art and a sense of social responsibility feel is important, is the philosophic pressure in the novel--the clear perception and affirmative voicing of the right value. You could, in that sense, write about almost anything--so long as it really meant something in the lives of human beings--and still write a revolutionary novel. You could mirror the doubts and portray the hopes of people who erred and groped, people in no sense expressing your opinions or thinking your thoughts; but you must write about them with understanding and purpose, and most likely they, in the end, must find something like understanding and purpose too. They must, at least, develop.

It was with something like this in mind that Fox demanded the return of the epic note in fiction--

that note which signifies, if not man's conquest of his mission, at least his capacity to comprehend it, and to end up on a note of enlightenment. Enlightenment stands for something very different from the easily contrived and seldom effective triumphs of heroes over villains, of workers over bosses. It is also to imply that those novels which are the best documents constitute the best fiction.

But surely the best novels are those which tell us the most revealing and true things about human existence; and though reactionaries may have written them, more times than not they will bear out a revolutionary thesis. Balzac was, on his confession, a royalist; but his books certainly offer a very poor case for royalism, or for any principle of aristocracy. Shakespeare, too, was very possible a royalist; but his plays are overwhelming indictments of greed and ambition and misuse of power. It was doubtless extreme in Jane Austen never once to mention the French Revolution, and not to notice the Napoleonic Wars through which she lived. But if she had, could she have any better expressed the limitations and

deficiencies of conservative England?

By this time, you are probably believing that in my deprecation of the American proletarian school I am standing firm against propaganda. Well, should artists devote themselves to art of propaganda?

"Art is good and propaganda is false and misleading and was used to sell us Liberty Bonds during the war", I quote Mr. Malcolm Cowley, "and to make us believe that Germans roasted little Belgian babies on the tips of their bayonets over a slow fire--so naturally hurrah for Art (whatever it is) and down with Propaganda".

But the question can't be answered quite so cavalierly. In terms of an apparently simple distinction between two familiar words, it conceals a type of metaphysical thinking that carries us back through the German Romantic philosophers at least as far as Kant, and a psychological Kant who advanced the notion that aesthetic activity and practical activity--in other words, art and life--are forever separate and that art has no goal outside itself, being "purposiveness without purpose"--Z weckmassigkeit ohne Z weck. This notion was elaborated by other German thinkers, and especially

by Schopenhauer, who in turn exerted a great influence on the Symbolist movement in France. Eventually it took the shape of a whole series of things supposed to be in eternal opposition--form against matter, art against life, artists against philistines, poetry against science, emotion against reason, vision or imagination against will or purpose, contemplation against action, and finally poetry or art against propaganda. In this last opposition, all the others are secretly contained.

"Art" is vision, form, repose, truth and beauty, the eternal, everything that is "good" for the artist. "Propaganda" is effort, change, science, philinism, falsity and ugliness, everything that is artistically "evil". Once we have accepted these definitions of art and propaganda, the question of choosing between them seems ridiculous.

The real answer to the question whether writers and painters should devote themselves to art or propaganda is that the question is irrelevant: writers should devote themselves to writing and painters to painting.

Yet there is a real distinction that partly takes the place of the one supposed to exist between

art and propaganda. The real distinction is not metaphysical, but personal and practical, and it depends very simply on the level of the mind from which one writes. If one writes only from the top level of consciousness, in the light of beliefs that have been recently acquired and not assimilated, one is almost certain to write badly, to neglect or distort the things that are hidden underneath, to write in a way that is emotionally false and can be dismissed as "propaganda". But if one has fully absorbed the same beliefs, has felt and lived them, one may treat them in a way that is emotionally effective--that is in other words "art".

I greatly fear that, with a few exceptions, the proletarian school in the United States has been writing from the top level of consciousness. They have been realistic in intent and naturalistic in method, concerned chiefly with the reporting of the facts, facts that are presented badly and often brutally, the purpose of the work being to show an individual meshed in the cogs of a machine-age. For example, Clifford Odets, who originally protested against the social system, has become less and less "social" with each weekly pay check from his

plays and Hollywood royalty. There are also writers, however, that use a more personal and subjective method, even though they, like the others, seek to interpret literary values in terms of human values. A notable example of this type of writing is found in Thomas Wolfe's "Of Time and the River", where the realism is tempered by a form of romanticism, with stress laid on the personal, imaginative elements in the story. There are a number of significant writers who see in the standardization of industry and the tendency toward any kind of regimentation a threat to that independence of thought that has always been held dear by American writers. This fear that the "system" may destroy a man's independence and integrity is the underlying idea of Evelyn Scott's recent work, "Bread and a Sword". Books like this--and there have been several of them lately--are protests against the danger of the individual being engulfed by mass-action and mass-thinking. It might be prophesied that if and as the trend toward standardization of American life and appeal to mass-thinking grows more threatening the writers who protest against such a situation will grow more numerous.

But such a literature or revolt can only serve

effectively if the writers do not regard it as propaganda and write from a "deep level of consciousness". I quote Marie Scott-James in The London Times:

"Nothing is wrong with poverty for subject material but few proletarian writers have perceived that poverty in itself is not a theme for imaginative literature; that circumstances, however bitter, concern the artist only through its effect on character and conduct".

Escape Literature

The escape literature of the last five years assumes a two-fold significance: first, as an escape from the social and economic problems themselves; secondly, as a right-about-face from proletarian literature. As Ernest E. Leisy of Southern Methodist University points out in his article "The Novel in America" (Southwest Review, Autumn 1936), there have been two significant trends in American fiction since the depression. There has been a declining interest in reminders of a depressed social order, and an increasing desire to find surcease from our cares by following stories laid on farms (regionalism) or in the past (historical fiction). The impulse to escape has extended even to the other side of the globe in "The Good Earth" and its sequels or Stuart Cloete's recent "Turning Wheels"; or has been found in such a compound of adventure, travel, geography, history, and psychology as "Anthony Adverse." In "Death Comes for the Archbishop," "The Great Meadow," "Long Remember," "Gone With the Wind," and Northwest Passage," there has been a nostalgic return to periods when comprehensible patterns of life could still be discovered.

After the debacle of the market and the subsequent sourness of proletarianism, it was

natural for the popular reading public to turn to the literature of escape, first with "Anthony Adverse" and then with "Gone With The Wind" and the Civil War group, as well as with countless novels of other historical periods. Another phase of the escape was by way of the inspirational or how-to-do-it book. Each of these groups will be given fuller treatment later in this thesis.

Beginning early in the thirties, as a reaction to proletarianism, the escape phase of American literature has grown to remarkable proportions. It also has interpretative functions. For sometime there has been noticeable a desire on the part of some to search out new values in an America which they see menaced by a spurious culture of cheap printing and cheaper thinking, by all the products of a machine-age that may undermine eventually a pristine independence of thought. Michael Foster's "American Dream" is a work which illustrates this point. In this semi-historical novel the author goes back to the past epochs of America, to the days of the colonists and the early settlers of the West, endeavouring to find in the habits and thinking of these sturdy pioneers a key to the "American Dream"-- a dream that appears to have been lost somewhere

along the march of time. Books like this seem very significant; they show that many American authors of to-day are not merely content to record the circumstances in the life of an individual as he comes into conflict with the complexities of twentieth-century civilization, but are intent upon making inquiries as to values, upon stripping a surface-civilization bare of those elements which, unless checked, have the power of stultifying and destroying human thinking and human happiness.

The literature of escape has been as much a part of the thirties as it always has been, and probably always will be, a part of every literary epoch. James Branch Cabell, the romanticist in his recent trilogy, "Smirt," "Smith" and "Smire," again stresses, although not too convincingly, the value of the dream in contrast to the realities of so-called "practical" living. At the same time he takes a fling at what he designates as the "dull, bawdy, photographic" novels of the present day, saying in "Smire" to the readers of these works:

"For it is not permitted you to perceive that these books are untrue to life. You are doomed to regard physical happenings with entire seriousness,

and to believe their importance is vital. You cannot see that no man lives in the external truth--'among salts and acids', says Stevenson,--but in the warm, phantasmagoric chamber of his brains, with the painted walls and the storied windows, regaling himself at every moment with his own vain-glorious, superb, false notion about his existence. You cannot see that every human life is a never-ending dream, a work of unadulterated romance....."

The impulse motivating the literature of escape appears to have been quicksand in the minds of many writers during the time of the depression, for they turned from a world seemingly gone mad to narrate in realistic fashion, but with romantic intent, stories of ages graced with a charm of living not characteristic of present-day conditions, or with a possibility for pleasant and stirring adventure denied those existing in an era of economic stress. "Anthony Adverse" is the first illustration of this type of book. The fact that it proved to be a best-seller over such a long period of time is evidence that a large part of the American reading public welcomed not only diversion, but also relief

from a situation that baffled their powers of thought. "Gone with the Wind" and "Northwest Passage" are types of the same thing, where the spurious romanticism of one or the other sections of America is again revived. During the last six or seven years there have been many novels written with the same romantic intent.

This impulse toward escape was noticeable in the short stories appearing during the worst days of the depression. These stories did not reflect the troubled condition of the country, but attempted, in romantic fashion, to divert and relieve the minds of their readers. It was not until the situation improved that the editors of magazines felt it wise to include in their columns realistic stories of the dark days, the reason being, in all probability, that they felt the American public both demanded and needed diversion. The short story in America has, for sometime, been built on a romantic pattern. There are exceptions, of course, but, on the whole, those periodicals in every nation that are produced for mass consumption are guided by editorial policies catering, necessarily, to mass-thinking. Some magazines have not been afraid to publish short stories that

deviate from the "pattern", among them the so-called "little" magazines and the better class of larger ones. In these there may be found, as in the novel, a reflection of that growing social self-consciousness characteristic of America to-day.

As was stated in the chapter "After the Crash," fantasy such as that found in the stories of Robert Nathan is becoming increasingly popular. To-day both his 1932 book, "One More Spring," and the recent "Winter in April" have large sales. So does Booth Tarkington "Rumblin' Galleries" series. These are all of the escape variety in some form.

Edward James's "The Gardener Who Saw God," which came out late last year, also falls in the group. It is a novel of mystical experience. By the law of contraries, first proclaimed by Heraclitus, and ages later by Blake, it would seem inevitable that the novel based on a materialistic dialectic so much in vogue in this chaotic age should stimulate by reaction the production of the novel based, as this one is, on a spiritual dialectic. There is, however, a vast difference in the creative processes which dictate the two forms, vaster, indeed, than the abysses which separate their respective goals. In

the first instance the goal is obvious, and the method leading the way to it by propaganda is patently naive; it is the method of the man who knows what he wants and quite ruthlessly adopts the most effective way of getting it. In the second instance, the goal is less tangible, being perfection itself, remote and inaccessible as only perfection can be. Humility may have no power at all in the material world, and for that very reason can be a force in the world of art, because, having no axe to grind, it is concerned, primarily, with the creation of images. "The Gardener Who Saw God" is an excellent antidote to such novels as Briffault's "Europa in Limbo" and Halper's "The Chute."

Escape in literature has always played a major part in life. There was a hope to escape to a paradise of supernal beauty and bliss in the classical legends of the Golden Age, in such Renaissance writers as Lyly, Sidney, and Spenser and in such later work as Thomson's "Castle of Indolence." But we must note that this idyllic Arcadianism was either frankly recreational and non-philosophic or else a cloak for allegory. Not until the middle of the eighteenth century was the idyllic dream taken seriously. Then

"The Light that never was, on sea or land" enthralled the youthful Wordsworth, but he soon questioned it as a "fond illusion." Keats sought to escape on "the viewless wings of poesy" from the "weariness" of actuality to the "charmed magic casements." Shelley, the high priest of this ceaseless and aimless quest for the unattainable, tells us that only his "fearful and monstrous" story of "The Cenci" is "a sad reality"; otherwise he "dreams what ought to be, or what may be." For him the Spirit of Beauty leaves "This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate." "Alastor" and "Epipsychidion" are matchless records of his fruitless quest for the phantom of desire. De Quincey's fantasies are filled with perishing dreams, and the wrecks of forgotten deliriums. "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Palace of Art" testify to Tennyson's reluctant renunciation of the life of illusion.

Among early American escape experts, there are Irving, Poe and Melville. Irving stated his Old World longing to escape from the commonplace realities of the present to "the shadowy grandeur of the past"--to a legend-haunted Alhambra or into the glamorous aspects of the American past. Poe takes the idyllic

dream more seriously than Irving. He wishes to escape into "an elevating excitement of the Soul." But perhaps the most vigorous and passionate escapist in American literature has been Herman Melville, mariner and mystic. "Moby Dick" was born of a clash between the hope of some escape paradise and the sight of a malignant reality from the deck of a whaler. In a series of essays, "Beyond Life," James Branch Cabell outlines his literary creed, his hostility to realism. He holds that veracity is the one unpardonable sin and "perceives this race to be beyond all wording petty and ineffectual." He follows the "instinct of any hurt animal to seek revenge in the field of imagination." Fortunately, the modern escape school has kept clear of getting tied up in any phantasmagorias of the Cabell variety.

Willa Cather's main theme has been the struggle for aesthetic or emotional self-realization amid the sordid environment of either the frontier or an industrial society. Her "O Pioneers!", "The Song of the Lark," "My Antonia," "Youth and the Bright Medusa," and "The Professor's House" furnish good models for any modern writer.

Escape into nature seems to be the obvious aspect of the wave of regionalism. It too has been successfully employed by Virgil, Lyly, Sidney, Spenser, Pope, Rousseau, Cowper, Burns, Coleridge and Shelley, and by the first really characteristic American writer, James Fennimore Cooper. Therefore, contemporary writers of escape literature should feel they are working in a noble heritage. One must admit that even in the short period under study the most worthwhile literature in America has been of this variety.

Perhaps the term "escape" is a poor one to use in any criticism. Writing in The London Sunday Times, Desmond MacCarthy condemns "escapist" as "one of the most unfortunate terms of contemptuous criticism ever coined," because, so far as it has a definite meaning, it applies equally to the purest and highest literature and that ~~that~~ which merely sentimentalizes reality. All art is an "escape," he believes--a flight of the mind into something better than reality. The point for critics is whether what the mind "escapes" into is worth contemplating or not. The category leaves questions of discrimination just where they were before. The

reader who enjoys "The Vicar of Wakefield" and the reader who loves "Little Lord Fauntleroy" are both "escaping from the facts of life."

I think Mr. MacCarthy would grant the use we are making of the term "escape literature" in this thesis--namely, that we are opposing it to proletarian writings. In the same article he describes as "nonsense" the contention that not until our social conditions have been revolutionized can literature attain its highest possible standard, and that, therefore, the poet or man of letters, to fulfill his proper function, must interest himself in the reorganization of society. There is no evidence, in his opinion, to support the theory of an inevitable connection between the highest art and a society in which wealth and privileges are equally distributed. Great minds have flourished and smaller but memorably perfect writers have done their work in the midst of social conditions not less confused and squalid than those which some of our younger writers complain inhibit them.

Historical Fiction

As already stated, we can best account for the trend in historical fiction that has been evident in American literature as one branch of the escape school. Authors are speculating about the meaning of their country's national past and interpreting it in the light of present problems. History in fictional dress, thereby, offers diversion and perhaps solution. Almost invariably the authors deal with important ideas but they have an advantage over the exacting and scientific historian. The writers bring to their speculation an experience pickled and seasoned in our war and post-war world. They import into historical novels, themes, subjects, inquiries, values, and philosophies that have not been treated there up to now--that have been the sole property of fiction. They also bring to it a skill and a craftsmanship that American historical fiction has never had before. Besides, they are good novelists and have written good novels, quite apart from their history. For the first time the historical novel is a novel first of all.

Professor G. Glenwood Clark of the College of William and Mary writes me that he sees in the trend of historical fiction a marked return to the idealism

and optimism so characteristic of American development, after the pessimism and cynicism of the 20's and the proletarianism of the early 30's. It amounts to a general reappraisal of all the historic past of America and an effort to draw therefrom lessons applicable to the present time--i. e., a need for the courage and self-reliance of the pioneer in solving the problems of to-day. Especially does it mean a re-evaluation and re-presentation of the meaning and effects of the Civil War upon the people of the United States. Professor Clarke also believes that this type of story has brought with it a return to the Victorian novel in bulk and general technique.

Publishers also voice their enthusiasm over the historical novel, which they regard as both historical and literary success. Mr. Herbert F. Jenkins, Vice-president of Little, Brown and Company, Boston, says:

"Since the depression there has been a marked increase in the popularity of the American historical novel, as illustrated by the success of 'Gone With the Wind', 'Drums Along the Mohawk', and 'Northwest Passage'. Stories of the soil whether dealing with the drought-stricken West or sharecroppers of the South, are having a considerable vogue. The proletarian

novel as a whole has proven to be rather disappointing both from a literary and sales point of view."

W. W. Norton, President of the publishing house, also tells me in a letter that there has never been a time when the reading public has been so "aware of what might be called a sense of history." It is becoming increasingly obvious that American political and social life are in a period of significant and rapid change. For that reason, Mr. Norton draws our particular attention to the various historical fiction and works his house is presenting. Mr. Quincy Howe, Chief of the Editorial Department at Simon and Schuster, New York, has a valuable analysis of historical fiction in his letter. He says:

"The most noticeable trend in fiction is toward the historical novel. This indicates that all readers now want something more than entertainment, though, of course, they must have a good measure of that ingredient. Without passing judgment on a number of recent historical romances, I think it can be said in general that they actually provide pure escape literature, but give the reader the illusion that he

is not wasting his time but is really learning something."

Two common functions of historical fiction in the general field of escape literature are held by the critics. First, as Professor Harold Lloy of the University of Washington suggests, the revival of the historical novel brings an emphasis on adventure and action and also popular philosophical reflection. "Drums Along the Mohawk" and "Northwest Passage" are prime examples of this leaning toward action. Secondly, as Miss Edith H. Walton of the New York Times points out, Americans are becoming increasingly conscious of their origins.

"I do not mean, merely," she states, "that we have been treated to an inordinate number of Civil War novels--or, to a lesser degree, novels of the Revolution and the pioneer west. Historical fiction is always and everywhere popular. It need not necessarily have any but a romantic significance. What I mean is that we have had a good many novels of recent years which trace a tradition, a career, a family straight through to the present day, which strives for a sense of a real, continuing

heritage. One such was Michael Foster's 'American Dream'. Another was Ellen Glasgow's 'Vein of Iron'. Recently, Sylvia Chatfield^{Bates}' 'The Long Way Home' resembles strikingly in its theme. With all deference to a distinguished novelist, I feel that Miss Bates's story is in certain respects superior."

Ellen Bowen Swain, the heroine of Miss Bates's novel which Miss Walton praises so highly as historical fiction, comes from a long line of valiant and remarkable women. They left no mark upon history, nor did they think of themselves as exceptional, but they had that special kind of adventurous sturdiness which has been the lifeblood of America. One of them was Ellen Bowen Ingram of the Connecticut Colony, whose intolerance outran the Puritanism of her day, who loved illicitly, and who was crowned young in a canoe when the arrow of a vengeful Indian reached her husband's heart. Another was Tryphena Rising, wife of a hunter and pioneer, who sent her son eastward out of the forest in order that he might seek learning, and left thus unprotected by the Indians. Still

another, the best of them all, was Ellen's own grandmother, Livia--who figures almost as importantly in the story as Ellen Swain herself.

It is hard to write a novel which dwells so lovingly on the past and yet not make it either sentimental or nostalgic. "The Long Way Home" is neither. From the first Ellen Bowen onward, her characters face toward the future; though cherishing the past, they do not seek to escape toward it. They are intelligent as well as courageous; they are in the vanguard always and not merely conservers of tradition. Like Ellen Glasgow's women, there is blood in their veins--but the metal, in this case, seems more durable. Invariably the heroes and heroines of the modern historical fiction are more noble and heroic than the corresponding leading characters in any other branch of literature. Good examples of personality conquering difficulty, or fortitude typically American, are plentiful all along the line. There is, consequently, a totalitarian, a patriotic theme in this literature.

Before making some study of "Northwest Passage", the example of action in historical fiction, we might mention some of the more recent in the group. Not always is the background American and some of it

trenches considerably on straight history and biography. Feuchtwanger's "The Jew of Rome" takes Josephus as the hero. In "The King's Good Servant", Olive B. White builds a story upon the dramatic climax of Sir Thomas More's life. Vincent Sheean's "Sanfelice" has the Neapolitan court, Nelson, and Lady Emma Hamilton play ~~a~~ parts and revolution serves as background for the action. There is revolution again in Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Summer Will Show", this time in Paris, and it makes the accompaniment to the experiences of the heroine.

Both of Walter E. Edmonds' best-sellers, "Rome Haul" and "Drums Along the Mohawk", have American historical settings. The former deals with the last days of the Erie Canal and the latter with the revolutionary war in Northern New York state, with too frequent detail on troop movement data that retards the narrative. Of course, there is "Gone With the Wind", but this will be discussed in a separate chapter. Nevertheless, we might say here that it ^{is} ~~a~~ deserving of the favour it has received and the 1937 Pulitzer prize. In no sense of the word is it a great book, but it is an excellent one, vivid, faithful to fact, and conveying vigorously the gathering of the war in the South, the divided opinions that preceded it, the

heroic determination that supported it, and the tragic devastation that accompanied and followed it. But we must note that the principal male characters come dangerously close to the heroes of melodrama, and some of its incidents are tarred with the same stick. Yet the story is enthralling and its heroine veracious and striking.

"Gone to Texas" by John W. Thomason is romance, action and excitement in Texas in the turbulent days that followed the Civil War. The popular "No Hearts to Break" by Susan Ertz is the story of the Baltimore girl who incurred the wrath of Napoleon when she married his brother Jerome. The New York Times says that here Miss Ertz has succeeded in doing what many biographers seem unable to do; she has given her heroine a character which convincingly explains her actions. "Doctors on Horseback" by James Thomas Flexner is a mixture of biography and fictionized detail. It tells of the many hardships of the pioneers of American medicine. With his instruments in saddle-bags, his destination a forest cabin, the early American doctor was engaged in the heroic task of thrusting back two frontiers. He was an integral part of the country's growth, and without him the settlers might not have made good

their stand beyond the mountains. And he was practising when medicine itself had not yet emerged from the frontier stage. By pitting his knowledge, ingenuity, and courage against the unknown barriers of disease, he built the foundation of modern medicine. This book contributes new detail to fill out the picture of America in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War.

And now for some study of the most popular historical novel of our day--"Northwest Passage" by Kenneth Roberts, author of four previous novels of the same type, "Arundel" (17th printing), "The Lively Lady" (8th printing), "Rabble in Arms" (9th printing), and "Captain Caution" (4th printing). Kenneth Roberts hates war but has specialized in the unprofessional and unconventional wars of early North America. As an historical novelist, his stature has been steadily growing, and "Northwest Passage" is his best book. With an overwhelmingly enthusiastic press, the choice of both English book clubs, "Northwest Passage" has gone through four large printings in less than a month. And in Australia, the publishers report that the advance sale has far exceeded that of "Gone With the Wind." Roberts's book is to-day's greatest best-seller on three continents.

Henry Seidel Canby in his Book-of-the-Month Club News review points out three particular story merits, and I intend to paraphrase that analysis. Furthermore, the book has value as a reliable and interesting chronicle of the American frontier when France and the Indians were still enemies, and the Far West a nameless continent known only by rumour and vague report.

The first merit to the story that Mr. Canby notices is the central figure. He is no romantic pattern of success, but a tough fellow with an iron will, no tact, unbeatable except by himself, but beaten there at the end. Magnificent failures are rare in romances. Rogers of Rogers' Rangers is a frontier American in spite of being a British officer who fought finally against Americans in the Revolution. He carried through the famous raid on the St. Francis Indians which made upper New England safe, by his own almost incredible energy and courage. He had the imagination to see that a Northwest Passage, if it could be found, across the Rockies to the Oregon, would pour the wealth of Asia over to the Atlantic. He persuaded London; and then, like so many British empire builders, was let down by his own government,

and his project stabbed in the back by jealous rivals. He dominates this book, a memorable figure, a master of the Indians, who loved as well as respected him, a tremendous drinker, with wit enough to write a play and a book; none too scrupulous in money matters, sexually loose, yet a man obsessed with a great idea, made on lines of greatness. You could beat him, but not kill him, or his idea. Here is an heroic character, sometimes comic, but more usually tragic, who deserved a rebirth into literature.

The second great merit Mr. Canby notes in the novel is the narration of the attack on St. Francis and the desperate starving march back through the wilderness, and the wild ride down the Connecticut on a raft. The facts Roberts got from his sources, but the story in all its realism and humour, and the drama of the massacre and the flight, are his own. It is a splendid sequence of adventures, rich in character, tense with excitement, yet carrying the reader like an eye witness, with not a single break or any relapse into fine writing or the usual bunkum of worked-up excitement. These chapters are history brought to life and humanized by a warm and honest invention.

And a third great merit of this novel is the way it is told. The narrator is a Maine boy who wanted to be a painter, and became one. After the rum party which booted him out of Harvard, he set out to make himself a painter of Indians. If this does not account for his part in the Indian war, it does make him an unusually sensitive describer, and takes him, as an onlooker with some detachment, to London, when Rogers is there, and to the Northwest when Rogers meets at last a destiny too strong for him. It is an artist who sees and tells all this hardship, bloodshed, frustrated ambition, an artist who sees unspoiled, almost unknown Indian America.

Mr. Canby does not say "Northwest Passage" is a great historical novel, for Roberts lacks elevation of style, has no poetry, and no deep-going originality, but he does say it is a very good one, with exceptionally interesting material in it. Mr. Roberts has succeeded where so many American writers of historical novels have failed. Like them, he has a fine assortment of types among his minor characters--his hard-boiled sergeant Indian fighter and his Maine roughneck hunters and fishermen are excellent, and in the Indian boy his hero brings back with him from

St. Francis is an entirely new type. But he has more freshness and more real humanity in his major characters than most of the chroniclers. Rogers was made for him by history, but Ann, the slum child who is the heroine, is an engaging and original character. And what recent romancer has had the courage to let the hero's boyhood sweetheart start perfectly beautiful, but become a termagant and a shrew?

"Northwest Passage" will lift for many a curtain which has hidden the obscure pre-Revolutionary eighteenth-century, when the elegance of the Augustan age was to be found on the American seaboard only a few hundred miles from the frontier life which was to make a new kind of nation in America. One criticism of the book I found particularly amusing. It was Ben Ames Williams's in *The Atlantic Monthly*. "Cap Huff's hot buttered rum was a drink so potent and enduring that a full evening of it would stay with you as long as a coonskin cap. 'Northwest Passage' is a book that will stay with you even longer."

From England, despite the fact the book has been selected by both the *Daily Mail Book-of-the-Month* and the *English Book Society* and bids fair to

repeat there the success it has won in its native land, have come some adverse criticisms. Brophy in The Daily Telegraph declares it to be a feat of sustained story-telling, of exciting the reader, of making him see and feel what is happening and wonder what will happen next. But he thinks the balance of the book is upset and its interest diminished by its author's refusal to concentrate on Major Rogers. Thus J. D. Beresford, another critic, considers it, in some ways, regrettable that it does not end at page 300, leaving that heroic figure as the principal subject. R. Ellis Roberts, too, suggests that a separate and prettier story should have been made of the idyllic love affair of Langdon Towne and Anne, whose charm and conversation, by the way, seem to him strangely Victorian for an eighteenth-century American maiden. And The Times Literary Supplement, after declaring that for the most of the first 300 pages the story travels continuously at an heroic height, adds that it never rises to that height again. But the whole book, in its judgment, is sword-and-cloak drama splendidly done.

Such criticisms, of course, can be levelled at any historical fiction. The very term--historical

fiction--is paradoxical and leaves wide chinks whereby critics may enter. But I believe that if any erring is to be made, let it be on the side of history. Let us save our novelists for novels. At that they present history to us in a more truly enlightening fashion and with more applicable philosophies than the historians.

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THE CIVIL WAR TREND

As a phase of the general interest in the historical novel, fiction again has been fighting the Civil War. The war always has been profitable material for American fiction, but in the present instance the wave of civil war novels contains particularly important literary and social facts for the student. From a literary standpoint the books must be dealt with separately in a critical way. In their social meaning the novels imply an increased self-consciousness of Americans about their past and a deep desire to understand their present.

The Civil War was the greatest strain ever put upon the structure of American national life. The present generation, therefore, are wringing from it whatever significance it contains for what they are and are to be. But do not make the mistake that the war stories are merely a department of the main trend towards the historical novel. Actually, the present one is the fourth cycle of Civil War novels. It is quite likely that had no "escape" literature been demanded of the times at all, this particular

cycle would have swung into popularity. America was due for a "Gone With The Wind".

The first wave was participated in by Howells, Henry James, Mark Twain and a few other notables. It was a Northern wave and was phrased in moral terms. There was not much battle in those stories and more love scenes. The second wave was twenty years later. The censorious but forgiving North was now replaced by a glamorous Southland. Now the South were taking up the lost cause and their literature became a literature of some dream restoring the vanished way of life, of course, a frustrated dream. The third wave was really incidental to the arrival of realistic, psychological fiction in 1895. Stephen Crane's "Red Badge of Courage" was not properly a Civil War novel but, in effect, a portrayal of an individual in battle--what he felt, thought and did.

However, Crane's work was followed by several minor Civil War fictional efforts and the third cycle extended over some years. In 1907 Winston Churchill brought out his "The Crisis". Four years later May Johnston wrote two--"The Long Roll" and "Cease Firing". The hero had a knack of turning up everywhere from ex-Captain Grant's woodyard to Sherman's

promenades in 1860 to Ford's theatre on Good Friday, 1865. In other words, her book presented a series of dramatic crises of the war, although they furnished a genuine panorama, there was more patriotic sentiment than good novel writing, and I believe that in historical novels it is far better to be expert than impassioned.

The larger part of the new cycle is devoted to the Confederacy; the Yankees, fewest in number, are the most off-hand and realistic about the war. For example, McKinlay Kantor in "Long Remember" uses the war primarily as a setting and mechanism for individual experience. His hero is even a conscientious objector. In "Arouse and Beware" he is still more indifferent to battles and the literary traditions of war. The essence of the novel is the experience of three individuals confronting emergencies in a desperate effort to save their lives. Kantor is using historical material as he would use contemporary material in a novel of contemporary life. From the north comes also Royce Brier's "Boy in Blue". Here is the career in war of an Ohio farm boy--before enlistment, through the war, on furlough, and finally home. Much emphasis is laid in the story on the hatred that grows up behind the

lines. As he recounts the methods of recruiting, elections, quartering supplies, etc., we are given information on some of the rackets associated with war behind the lines.

Mr. Andrew Lytle's "The Long Night" is a southern literary cocktail and contains a vigorous philosophy of revenge. Caroline Gordon's "None Shall Look Back" also bears the idea of national tragedy. But Stark Young's "So Red the Rose" belongs with the moonlight and honeysuckle literature of the eighties.

Now for Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With The Wind"! Despite the fact that Professor William Lyons Phelps at Yale said it is "an enduring piece in our literature", I feel it is important as a phenomenon, but hardly as a novel. A second reading, after the dramatics have become subdued in your impressions, will show little thought, very little philosophical overtone. The South has not "gone with the wind", so the main thesis is a little fake. She dared not carry her story far past the Reconstruction for that very reason. The story documents daily life very well but the ideas are rudimentary. The author has no eye and no ~~feeling~~ feeling for human character and I find a page by

page reliance on all the formulae of sentimental romance--this, in the face of what book critics have been shouting for a year and a half! We even get the offensive effects of melodrama.

Significant enough is the fact that in the actual south a book, now ranked in general popularity almost equally with Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With The Wind", is Clifford Dowdey's "Bugles Blow No More". It is better but is still overshadowed by one other. It carries Richmond, the Confederate capital, through the war years, and in doing so gives us the rise and fall not of a nation only but of a society as well. There is no mechanical formula, like "Grand Hotel", yet we see the war dominating a great variety of experience.

Of the three remaining Civil War story to be discussed James Boyd's "Marching On" is one of the best. Certainly, it is the best in the life of the Confederate army. The army table, comradeship of the men, the fatigue and fear are done from life. The northern prison is particularly good. But like almost all other stories there is a weakness--here the use of a romantic love story as a unifying force. William Faulkner's "The Vanquished" suffers from an overdose of William Faulkner.

The latest Civil War story (March, 1938) is by Hervey Allen, the author of "Anthony Adverse". It is entitled "Action at Aquila". In a statement on the jacket Mr. Allen says that almost every incident in the book "was taken from word-of-mouth reminiscences by Civil War veterans, both Union and Confederate, and from people who lived in the towns, cities, and the country in the area covered by the story". The story is written in a studied romantic vein. The Civil War was hugely melodramatic. It had its wild and terrible romance. Mr. Allen has selected the kind of truth most interesting to himself and likely to be most pleasing to his readers. It includes a horse named Back Girl; a solitary ride from Harrisburg to the Shenandoah, with appropriate adventures on the way; a secret nobly kept in order that the bearer of it might not take an unfair advantage in love; a historic character or two, including ex-President Buchanan and General Sheridan; a hidden valley, where a family whose plantation house Colonel Franklin has been required to burn may take refuge; a battle scene as unflinching portrayed as that in "The Red Badge of Courage"; tragedy aplenty; but what may be called a happy ending for those in whom our interest has been most deeply engaged. Mr.

Allen moves our emotions but he never lets us down.

In comparing it with "Anthony Adverse" the New York Times Review notes it is only about one-fourth as long. Yet it is held together in the same fashion by the personality, and to some extent the philosophy of its leading character. On this thread are strung incidents which would otherwise be merely episodic. One feels that Mr. Allen has projected himself into this character of Colonel Franklin, and that he lingers, as the Colonel did, over scenes which are only loosely linked with the romantic framework of the book.

Mr. Duffus's criticism is one of praise for this romantic novel but warns us to "be sure and hide it in the hay or the mattress--the realists will get you if you don't watch out".

REGIONALISM

American literature has always shown an interest in the mosaic of sections that make up the United States. Fennimore Cooper and the early frontier writers were the first to introduce world readers to real Americana, and not merely New England copies of Old England literary culture. Mark Twain was a pioneer in his days and likewise Bret Harte. The Middle West, the West, the dust-bowl area, the South, the Michigan woods, the Maine fishing coast, all have been written about. But the last few years have seen an even greater degree of regionalism in the literature of America. Of course, such stories are escapes out of the industrial and economic chaos of the cities, for with hardly an exception, they are rural. In the novel, present interest in regionalism seems to be growing rather than fading out. There are authors in almost every state who are writing this kind of novel. Much of it, certainly, is poor, but some of it is exceptionally well done.

Professor Francis Wolle of the University of Chicago believes that regionalism is the best antidote to what he calls "brutalism", all the deadening philosophies found in social problems with urban settings.

This is one of the outstanding features of not only Hemingway's last novel, but of those of Sandoz, Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, and Dos Passos as well. We must qualify Anderson for many of his stories, although full of iconoclasm and disregard, are to a degree regional. The brutality of these futilitarians' attitude to life is shown in a "shocker" technique. Homespun farm and small community stories, on the other hand, gain by simple situations involving simple, but none the less interesting, characters. It is the atmosphere which counts. Consequently, the treatment in being suitable to the story is more natural and more of an escape for the reader.

Regional literature will be found under other categories, including Civil War fiction and even proletarian literature. But on the whole it is a literature of escape and of atmosphere. Let us examine the regions in turn.

There has been no more marked feature of the literature of the past few years than the output of novels on and from the South. No longer are these novels of the romantic type which for years after the Civil War sang the litany of a defeated people; indeed, quite to the contrary, their outstanding characteristic

has become a stark realism. To the ringletted maidens and chivalrous youth of an earlier period have succeeded the poor white, the mountaineers, the Negroes, and the mill-owners of a South becoming steadily industrialized.

In the first flush of interest in the stiffening literature of the region there has, it must be admitted, been a tendency to forget those earlier realists of the South who, like Constance Fenimore Woolson and Charles Egbert Craddock wrote with genuine insight and living fidelity of the humble inhabitants of the Southern states. They blazed a trail which has led to-day into many fields.

Among contemporary novelists, despite the general preoccupation with the lowly, the palm still goes to the author whose interest in the main has been with the aristocracy--Ellen Glasgow. Miss Glasgow began in the old tradition and has become a pioneer of the new. Former works were "They Stooped to Folly" and "The Sheltered Life"; the one within our period is "Barren Ground", a novel of the soil in which qualities universal to the struggle between man and nature are portrayed.

William Faulkner is a writer of the South but he

is also a writer with a proletarian bias, and the latter nullifies the possible charm that might come from his first quality. In "Sartoris", "Sanctuary" and "Light in August", we find unsparing naturalism in an appalling world of perverts, degenerates, and men of savage primitive passions. He has power that cannot be denied, but to read him is to live in a nightmare of horror. He is the best example of the influence of Freud in American literature, but he also, at least artistically, has been influenced by James Joyce. Nor, though his depiction may be faithful to a degree, is it broadly representative of Southern life. One gets too firm an impression of descriptions of lists of depraved men.

Madox Roberts has written "The Time of Men". A novel of mountain folk, it is grim in its unflinching portrayal of the meagreness of existence among an ignorant, poverty stricken people; but it is shot through with a valiant spirit of poverty and mood. Marjorie Kinman Rawlings in 1933 wrote "South Moon Under". This is a tale of the Florida scrub country and the background is pictured with liveliness and truth. The characters are vigorously drawn. Following the success of that book, the same author this year has given "The Yearling" with the same venue. Its nomination by the Book-of-the-Month for March gives some indication

of the current interest in regional literature. Roy Helton's "Nitchy Tilley" is the story of ten young people who come from the country to the town. Perhaps the most complete picture of the South has been written by T. S. Stribling in his trilogy that won the Pulitzer Prize. The stories--"The Forge", "The Store" and "Unfinished Cathedral"--progressively picture the South from Civil War days to the present. Berry Fleming's "Siesta", which came out in 1935, is another effective portrayal of the South.

Two years ago the Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company established literary fellowships to be awarded to promising writers who are in need of financial assistance to complete projected books. Of the last six awards for the novels, two have been given to writers of regional literature. In 1937 a prize went to E. P. O'Connell for his "Green Pastures", a story of the Louisiana swamp-lands at the mouth of the Mississippi. For this year the regional award is given to Robert Penn Warren's novel based on the Kentucky tobacco war. This book is nearing completion and will probably be published next fall.

The play "Tobacco Road" by Erskine Caldwell preaches in a proletarian vein but there evidently is enough local

colour interest to warrant its continuous playing on Broadway for almost five years. Even "Gone With the Wind", a Civil War novel, wins as much popularity through its portrayal of Southern life as it does through its historic and patriotic appeal. "Lamb in His Bosom" by Caroline Miller is a story of simple people with elemental passions in the Georgia county.

Barbara Webb, whose novels "Three Who Were Strong", "Pedigree of Honey", "Misty Mountain", and "Whippoorwill's Cry" have reached an ever-enlarging public, has written in "Flight from Yesterday", a book which will place her unquestionably on the list of important American fiction writers. This new book is a novel of character and of social criticism combined with the author's familiar touch in romance and use of the Virginia hills for a background. The book is also a mystery novel, tightly plotted and thrilling. The wealth and position which made his mother a social leader on two continents brought Duncan Abbott into the shadow of the hangman's noose, charged with the murder of his wife. Feeling instinctively that her son was innocent, Mrs. Abbott set about the task of unearthing facts and motives deeply hidden in the young couple's past. The story of the marriage is a revelation

of the complexities of modern American life which were too great for two well-meaning young people. Gripped by social forces which they did not understand and were not trained to meet, they met inevitable tragedy.

"You Have Seen Their Faces" by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White is a comprehensive, clear-eyed, unretouched portrait of the tenant farmers of the South. This challenging section of the country is little known to outsiders, and the picture the authors paint is one that nobody has been able to see before unless he went himself through the countryside and talked with the farmers at their cabin doors. Mr. Caldwell and Miss Bourke-White spent months doing just that, and the fact that they are both artists has made their book dramatic, beautiful, sympathetic and deeply moving.

In "Shadows Slant North" by Mary Bledsoe, the "Lost Provinces" of the North Carolina mountains provide the setting for the pleasant if undistinguished little story of the folk dwelling there. Its heroine, Judith Harlord, is the eldest girl in a very large family. Her father is a well-meaning, shiftless sort of person, but from her grandfather she inherits a mental hunger which craves the education she finally manages to get. Judith is a sympathetic heroine, and there are many mildly

interesting descriptions of the mountain life which was changing so rapidly during the period covered by the novel. In Judith's childhood there were no decent roads and for weeks at a time the little communities were cut off, one from another. The coming of the railroad, the demoralization brought about by prohibition, the struggle to obtain a livelihood, all have their place in the book.

Of course, Harry Kroll's recent "I Was A Share-Cropper" is a propaganda book that presents the desperate conditions of the share-croppers in the West Tennessee lowlands. They wander from landowner to landowner in search of better wages. Kroll tells of their wanderings, himself a member of a share-cropping family, and indicts the system. However, the book is filled with sheer regionalism.

"Maw", his mother, a great mountain of energy--"No frozen dawn ever halted her"--is shown in her weakness as well as in her strength and therefore becomes life-like. Her ability to "run the cards and foretell events and read a coffee cup" alters the family course repeatedly. Also her refusal to hear her children rated as "white trash" and her demand that they exhibit their learning to other children who hooted them is a touching scene.

Maw could read and figure, but she could not write; however, she chastised the multiplication tables into her offspring.

Darius, her husband, accepted life and never ceased working during it. He always said that when they moved next it would be to a place "where fried pigeons would fly into your mouth." He is magnificently drawn. Darius used to say that the grave was the end of the share-croppers and even their bones would be unremembered; in the end, the son, with an education and big money in his pocket, comes back to find that the State highway has been built over Darius's grave. But somehow I feel Mr. Kroll wants us to blame, and unjustly, decent-living Mr. and Mrs. America in their automobile. Is that a convincing thesis?

However, the pages of "I Was A Share-Cropper" are a positive mine of suspicions, herb remedies and "pore folks" recipes, as extolled by Maw; of crop planting, harvesting, the time it takes to clear ten acres of land and the amount of money a man is paid for so doing, as remarked by Darius; and of the venture of Harry, the author, and Soddy, his elder brother, as roaming photographers in the backwoods South.

Regional interest in the South has always centered more or less on the negro, so we cannot claim any special significance of popularity with that group for our period

Starting in the twenties with Du Bose Heyward's "Porgy" and the stories of Mamba's daughters amid scenes of Charleston life, however, interest has not ~~been~~ decreased. In Julia Peterkin's "Black April" and "Scarlet Sister Mary", we have plantation sketches, piquant in their small incident and a mine of negro superstition and lore. Roark Bradford's "Ol' Man Adam and His Children" was a moderately popular novel, but when Marc Connelly dramatised it and called it "Green Pastures", theatre-goers hailed it as a new genre for the stage. Even Hollywood has made a success out of it. Zora Hurston, herself a negro, has written a fairly recent fine book, "Jonah's Gourd of Wine".

The southern literature of James Branch Cabell is a totally different type from the regional group we have been dealing with here, so we will dismiss it from this chapter.

Other districts have had their share in literary records of recent years. In 1933 Gladys Hasty Carroll wrote her now famous portrayal of Maine/farm life in "As the Earth Turns". James Gould Cozzens wrote the happenings of a Connecticut village in "The Last Adam". In the same year Louis Bromfield wrote "The Farm", a Middle West story, really a biography of a family disguised as fiction,

with the author in third person. In 1935 the Pulitzer prize in fiction went to the Harper prize novel "Honey in the Horn," by H. L. Davis. It is a tale of pioneer Oregon.

Sarah Ware Bassett, the author of "Eternal Deeps" and "Hidden Shoals" recently has woven humour and romance around the genial people of Cape Cod in "Shining Headlands". Only the prospect of leaving the shining headlands of home made the determinedly unmarried Thurza Bourne realize that she belonged where the sound of the sea was ever in her ears, and more important, where she might be ever near the touch of Leander's lighter, skillful fingers and the sight of the sunlight on his rough gold hair. It took a summer of excitement, emotional complications, and near tragedy to bring about this turn of events which surprised Thurza and Leander themselves most of all. The breath of windswept reaches, the blueness of the sea, the emerald of the salt marshes of Cape Cod, and all the drolleries, common sense and deep humanity of its people, are again in this novel by an author famous for stories of this locale.

Regionalism always will have a definite place in the literature of America for the geography and variety of types of character forbid any strongly national literature. In the end this makes for a treasure-house of literary source

material. A far-flung nation, peopled with persons engaged in so many different occupations, offers a constant interest to the regional writer. On the other hand, sectional literature will never possess the national and unifying force that historical fiction exerts.

Inspirational Literature

Publisher's lists have recently broken out in a rash of books on how to get along. If you are single, married, ambitious or neurotic, somebody has lately written a book to tell how you may better your condition. This sort of writing used to be called inspirational. Harry Hansen has now labelled it "boot-strap" literature. It aims to pull up your general culture to a higher level much the same as the literary magazine digests attempt, and, on the other hand, rationalizes ordinary living into a science so fool-proof that one cannot but succeed--providing, of course, that you follow the suggested exercises.

For instance, Dorothea Brandes's "Wake Up and Live", which incidentally had a lot to do in pioneering this type of book, suggests that the ambitious reader make a point of every day performing some task that might ordinarily be distasteful to him. Then in 1936 along came "Live Alone and Like It" by Marjorie Hillis. This time it wasn't to prod the reader into heretofore unimagined feats of success with latent energy, not used before, but soft-soap for bachelor girls. It advised them not to look too enviously upon their married cousins, to tear into their own work and lose their desire for a

husband, home and children in hobbies and social service work. This book provoked a reply by Anne Fisher--"Live With A Man and Love It", with suggestions as to a programme for peaceful domesticity. Each how-to-do-it book seems to provoke an argument.

Still the best-seller in the non-fiction list is a book of this type, written last year by Dale Carnegie--"How to Win Friends and Influence People". It is probably the most sensible and efficacious one of the lot, although it too has been countered by a popular parody in Irving Tessler's "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People". Carnegie's book professes to cover such points as: how to develop that ability; how to understand and get along with people; how to make people like you; how to win others to your way of thinking. During the last twenty-four years Carnegie has trained more than 15,000 business and professional men and women--among them some of the most famous in the country. Actually "How to Win Friends and Influence People" is nothing more than a book that tells us all to be "yes-men" but polite double-crossers on the side until we get what we want. In between Carnegie's instructions he sandwiches brief success stories and anecdotes of live-wire go-getters. Now by no

stretch of critical standards can this book, or any of its ilk, be termed literature. Most large organizations such as Westinghouse Electric, Bell Telephone, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company etc., see to it that their salesmen read copies.

In the "how-to-do trend" Marjorie Hillis has written two other books--"Orchids on Your Budget" and "Corned Beef and Caviar". In both cases the style is breezy and popular philosophy is bandied about in an entertaining fashion. Agnes Rogers has written "Why Not Enjoy Life?", much the same as "Wake Up and Live" in instructional value. One of the latest volumes on the list are "Marriages Are Made At Home" by Clarita de Forceville. It might very well have been called "How to Preserve Marriages and House-break Husbands". Its tone is sincere and helpful, earnestly endeavouring to guide the intelligent woman in the proper training of the spouse, but it is hardly literature in the true sense of the word.

Leisure time literature has had a considerable vogue in our period. Under whatever organization of society the future is likely to bring there will be a redistribution of labour and this will make the problem of caring for free time a pertinent one. In the introduction to his "Theory of the Leisure

Class", Thorsten Veblen says: "It is the purpose of this book to discuss the place and value of the leisure class as an economic factor in modern life." This seems to be a thesis that is held generally. C. de Lisle Burns has written "Leisure in the Modern World" for a depression reading public, and L. P. Jack "Education Through Recreation". "Community Drama" is a report of the National Recreational Association presenting suggestions for a community-wide programme of dramatic activities. "Music in American Life" by Augustus Zamzig is a survey of amateur musical activities based on findings of the nation-wide research of the National Research Association and is a manual of practical suggestions. Both Olga Samaroff Stokowski's "The Layman's Music Book" and Deems Taylor's "Of Men and Music" are best-selling non-fiction. Margaret Doubten a few years ago wrote a book, the popularity of which showed a national interest in the subject, entitled "The Dance and Its Place in Education". The Leisure League of America sponsors the sale of chap-books of leisure literature with the general one by Ernest Elmo Calkins, "The Care and Feeding of Hobby Horses", leading the parade.

The depression has brought a nation-wide en-

thusiasm for self-improvement and the result has been shown in books like Lancelot Hogben's "Mathematics for the Millions", Lin Yutang's "The Importance of Living", and Hendrik Willelm van Loon's "The Arts", and William Cheyney's "World History of Art". But Van Loon has held the stage before and well, and so his present work is very near the top in best-selling non-fiction.

"The Arts" deserves fuller mention here, first by virtue of its popularity as a typical example of a trend, and secondly, because of its own merit. It tells the story of painting, sculpture, architecture, and music, as well as the so-called minor arts, from the days of the cavemen until the present time. Here are three competent critics' opinions of the book. William Soskin of the New York Herald-Tribune "Books" comments thus:

"It is the healthiest history of the arts I have ever read. I have rarely come upon a scholarly work which reflected intimate experience, direct observation of the arts, travel, personal devotion to the artists, informal friendship and understanding of the ways of musicians and painters as does Van Loon's fine book. The reader may have no glimmering of an idea of what a fugue is, or what polyphony means; but before he is through with Van

Loon's homely, expert tutoring and his delightful informality that can encompass Bach, Gershwin, 'The Three Blind Mice' and Gregorian chants within a few pages, the reader comes miraculously close to expert understanding."

Van Wyek Brooks, author of famous and scholarly critical work, "The Flowering of New England", writes:

"I feel like the Sultan with Scheherazade prepared for a thousand nights and never a dull one. The inexhaustible gusto and ingenious explanations and the art of linking everything together and the pictures--the best Van Loon has ever done--seem to me perfectly delightful. It really makes one believe that art is something to be enjoyed".

Rockwell Kent, the artist, says:

"The lives of artists have been poignant with exaltation and, too often, tragedy. And nobody knows it. And now the hundreds of thousands who hang upon the words of Hendrik van Loon will listen to him tell about the arts and about their creators. They will listen to him and be thrilled".

And as a last comment, here are the figures of sale of "The Arts" over the last six-month period:

First printing----	145,000
Second "	---- 20,000
Third "	---- 25,000

Fourth printing----	20,000
Fifth "-----	<u>50,000</u>

TOTAL.....260,000

Another class of inspirational literature has been the popular economic manual. Gilbert Seldes' book for the middle class, "Your Money and Your Life", is a good example. The middle class, to which the warnings and exhortations of this book are addressed, embraces not only members of the 27,000,000 American families who earn less than \$15,000 a year but also those who, presumably with incomes considerably less than the figure, count their income by the week instead of by the year, or have only a thousand or two laid by for a rainy day and would be hard put to it to raise \$1,000 in even a desperate emergency. The group can meet instalment payments but cannot see how the boy can be sent to college, and to them another twenty to fifty dollars a week "would mean freedom from worry and great enjoyment of life". Mr. Seldes is greatly concerned about both the present and the future of this class. He sees it steadily drained of income and gradually losing its freedom. What is worse, it is making no effort to protect itself or to correct the maladjustment to industry and society from which it suffers. Unless it pays as much attention to public affairs, the time will soon come, he warns, when private affairs

will have ceased to exist. There is no end of advice and prescription in circulation directed at members of the class as individuals and intended to make them happier or more presentable, but "you may wake and live and discipline and exercise and improve yourself until you are almost unbearably perfect, and there will still be no chance in the world for you, because the world for which you have been preparing yourself has been destroyed".

This, assuredly, is a gloomy forecast, but Mr. Seldes is ready with arguments to justify it. The thinking of America, he insists, is done from above or below----from above by corporations, propagandists or superior persons; from below by Communists or other prophets of economic disaster----and nine-tenths of it is against nine-tenths of the people. The middle class can hold its own against Communism only if it is strong, and against Fascism only if it is free; but its freedom and strength are being undermined by unofficial attacks upon civil liberties of various kinds and the country may actually vote itself into a dictatorship by supporting executive and legislative policies which solve pressing problems by other than free democratic methods. If there is a dictatorship, it is the middle class that will go to the wall. The middle class, moreover, is the one that pays, and Mr. Seldes sees it paying, directly or indirectly, not only for things that benefit it or keep it alive but

for bankrupt railroads, low wages, labour troubles, the calamities of nature and the mistakes of industry and business.

I do not propose to cover the entire field of non-fiction reading along the inspirational line but some titles might be mentioned. Here are some of the better-selling titles of W. W. Norton and Company: "Intelligence in Politics" by Max Osgoli; "Controlling Depressions" by Paul Douglas; "Create the Wealth" by William Beard; "Nations Can Live at Home" by O. W. Willcox; "Can Industry Govern Itself?" by O.W. Willcox; "Government is a Planned Democracy" by A. N. Holcombe; "Crisis Government" by Lindsay Rogers; "The New Internationalism" by Clark Foreman; "Can We Stay Out of War" by Phillips Bradley; "Challenge to Democracy" by C. DeLisle Burns; "The New Democracy" by Harold L. Ickes; "Spending to Save" by Harry L. Hopkins; "Years of Tumult" by James H. Powers; and the now famous "Inside Europe", of many editions, by John Gunther. Those books are almost without exception published for the popular market.

"American governments--your governments--are spending fifteen billion dollars a year. You pay for the army's latest purchase of tanks, for the gymnasium in the neighbouring school, for the mending crew working on the state road, for the inkwells in the mayor's office, for the relief cheque just

to the widow with three children, for the crop

reduction bounties to farmers--by your taxes", writes William J. Shultz, tax consultant, Professor of Economics at the College of the City of New York, author of nationally-known works, in his book "Your Taxes". It is an exposé of racket and reform of political knavery and official blundering. And quite as effective probably in its way as Dean Swift's satires.

The events of our times have brought to the average reader an increading awareness of the vital part which the economic system plays in his life, and a demand for a means whereby an abstract science can be brought simply, yet completely and authentically, within the grasp of the layman. S. A. Spencer's "The Greatest Show on Earth" makes the once dismal science so simple and so interesting that it can be understood at a glance by the most casual reader. Mr. Spencer, utilizing a striking and original technique of blending pictures with text, has presented in this book the drama of man's struggle for worldly goods in terms of our daily and industrial life. More than narrative, more than pictorial, it presents the giant spectacle of Man at Work, and analyzes the dynamic structural and functional relationships which make up American industrial civilization. The narrative is concrete, logical and exciting.

Literature has pointed out the joys of the simple life during the depression. There have been many books that suggested a return to the farm or a similar reestablishing of American families upon a more virile, if less complex socially, bases. Typical among these is Charles Allen Smart's "R.F.D." (originally entitled "Invitation to the Country"). After some years spent in and near New York as an editor, teacher, and novelist, Smart inherited a farm in southern Ohio. With considerable misgivings about his prospects as a farmer, he moved out and took charge. A few months later he married a girl from Massachusetts. This book is the story of the first three years of their adventure, which is both contemporary and dateless, and altogether American. In these three years the Smarts have learned a great deal about farming, perhaps even more about America, and a few fundamentals about life in general. They have bred sheep and cattle, found out what it means to keep them alive in extremes of cold and heat, sold them at auctions. They have seen crops burned up in a major drought and washed out in a major flood. As "apprentice farmers" from the East they have had interesting and significant relations with neighbours, townsfolk, the cooperatives, the government. They

have kept their own minds and bodies alive, integrated, close to realities. They know what it costs to farm, in money, in work, in discomfort, in isolation from earlier surroundings; and they know what it pays, both in money and in deep satisfaction. Above all, they have had an enormous amount of fun. This is a narrative of people, animals, and nature, seen and reported with sensitiveness, humour and gusto. It is a book rich in ideas, both practical and general. Everyone who has nourished a secret dream of getting back to the land will read this book with eager interest, and will find realistic encouragement--an American story, typical in life.

Inspirational literature great? Hardly can we claim that because, since it has been largely inspired by the depression and current social and economic upheavals, it is as timely as magazine articles. On the other hand, it represents one phase of literature that this thesis has discussed before--namely, that the literature of a nation is related to the immediate life of the people. To this extent then, bootstrap literature is important.

American Humanism

The basic attitude of the American people, as reflected in their literature, always has been and probably always will be one of optimism. Now the primary cause of this optimism was the belief in the infinity of American natural resources and the laissez-faire economic political and social philosophy which inevitably resulted. The optimism of to-day, however, when American writers realize the limitations of national resources, will be a social optimism.

"Now if the new social optimism is to escape European anarchy" writes Professor Robert E. Spiller of Swarthmore College, "it must find its inspiration in that of Franklin, Jefferson, Emerson, Whitman, and others who have given expression to the American experience. These writers all expressed the optimism, the faith in their own power, which the American people of their time felt".

Of these four writers, Mr. Spiller considers Whitman the greatest. Jefferson had said that "the American man would become corrupt if, like the European, he built great cities"; Franklin had added the possibility of failure to his precepts for success; Emerson proclaimed that man was born to goodness, but was perverse enough to live in evil; but for Whitman, nothing could shake faith in himself, in his

country, in man.

The black pessimism of Mark Twain, coming directly after the irrational optimism of Whitman, was an indication of a fundamental change in the times. The closing of the frontier put an end to the belief in infinite natural resources; agrarian individualism became commercial capitalism. This pessimism of Twain instigated the beginning of a critical movement in American literature. The time for an inventory had come and with it came the first modern American humanists--Adams. It was he who discovered for man a place in the universe.

If Americans are looking for a rebirth of the heritage of optimism, they must seek it in terms of the "centripetal urge of dawning maturity"; disillusion is not enough for to-day's literature. On the whole, fortunately, American writers are expressing their belief in themselves and in the society in which they live by careful observation and study, rather than by mere gusto alone. A sure ground of optimism in contemporary American literature is to be found in the writers of social vision, many of whom are escapists who have discovered new hope in a promised land of social reform. Time has shaped the gospel of many of them into various degrees of

socialism; but to the literary historian, their significance lies not so much in what gospel is preached as in the presence of a gospel to be preached.

But when novelists and playwrights of to-day forsake the basis of optimism they involuntarily present the man who holds the democratic ideal as a figure of pathetic tragedy. He is pictured as embattled on all sides--utterly unable to contend against the unfriendly forces around him. He is a defeatist. He believes he stands in the twilight of human freedom, and that the only noble course is to die fighting either for Fascism or Communism, whichever of the two evils seem less objectionable to him.

There is no reassuring optimism here. It never occurs to him that he might live fighting for Democracy. It never occurs to him that this is his fight, even if it never comes to a physical battlefield. This fight begins in his own mind when he beats down the familiar sound of old catch-phrases and grasps the living meanings behind them--when he overcomes the effects of extremist propaganda and comes to a realization that his own form of government makes a brighter gospel than any of them. To forsake optimism, therefore, brings too many serious complications.

The danger point at which the departure from optimism might be made, unless care is taken, is

realism. The most striking characteristic of the new realism is its acceptance of the fact that for the majority of people in the United States the most significant factor in their lives is their struggle to achieve a satisfactory adjustment to the economic, social, and political organization of the society into which they are born. But in the optimistic realists of to-day, there is an attitude towards life that is sounder and more hopeful than that of their predecessors, the pessimists and the moralists. A realist, as Professor Philip Hicks describes, is a writer who seeks to know as much of the phenomena of life as is humanly possible and to resist the temptation to interpret what he observes in terms of a particular philosophy. The realist stresses everyday life. He uses average men and women as the most effective symbols with which to clothe truth. The scene is shifted from the drawing room, the summer resort, and the moonlit garden, to the kitchen and the workshop and the city streets.

Many realists not only depict the problems of everyday life but offer solutions. However, there is no such thing as absolute objectivity for the artist's job is one of selection. Therefore, many realists who advocate a change of the present social system are frequently accused of propaganda.

Here is where we have to split hairs with regard to social literature--is it art or propaganda?

Let us take John Steinbeck's "In Dubious Battle" as an example. That is a realistic novel, depicting Communist agitators in a sympathetic light, but it is not necessarily Red propaganda. A book is propaganda when we detect in it a note of falsity or of special pleading in what purports to be true. A book is literature when it has power to lift us out of our daily absorption with our personal concerns and to direct our imaginative vision toward some beauty or truth which the author has better apprehended--perhaps, even "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed".

Edwin Arlington Robinson's "King Jasper" is an example of the modern realistic viewpoint in poetry. If the American civilization is doomed, Robinson seems to say, it is doomed because it is material, acquisitive and conscienceless. This is not a confession of despair, but a realist's reminder of certain truths many have forgotten.

Has Humanism been forsaken in American writings since the depression? To some extent, it has, but with the change in the mental climate of the last two years, the mental climate in which the author

works, faith in the nobility and dignity of the human race has been restored somewhat.

The Humanists of to-day believe that the universities should make the humanities human by changing methods of study, and that the world must return to Matthew Arnold's basis for literary criticism: "the best that has been thought and said in the world". The Humanists' challenge is a challenge to see as much value in assimilation of old truths as in new facts. Iconoclastic or propaganda literature, then, has no associations with humanism. Sydney stated that the humanities hold the supreme place as teachers of mankind, and of the three humanities, he deemed poetry supreme, since it fused the merits of the other two, history and philosophy. Aristotle and Longinus, the first humanists, believed that the Mind was the measure of all things; they were followed by the medieval humanists, who had to struggle against a dominant interest in theology, and the Renaissance humanists who were associated with classical literature. Although many agree in principle with the Humanists' philosophies, few can agree on concrete proposals. Some general conclusions, however, can be reached: Humanists have little faith in progress; they believe that conduct is three quarters of life; that the way of life is

not challenged by new discoveries; and that the great source of wealth is human experience. As moralists, Humanists have been called new Puritans with old intolerance.

Now that makes a definite problem for American literature. The traditional tenor of American thought is one of optimism--joy over the experience of progress. How can that optimism be reconciled with humanism? This takes us back to the second chapter of this thesis--"The American Nation". There it was pointed out that the very cosmopolitan nature of America's population was both a problem and yet a blessing. Humanism holds that the great source of wealth is human experience. Has not America an infinite mosaic of culture to base its experience and literature upon, such as no other country ever had?

Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, the two leaders of humanism in America, aver that the great stumbling block in education is premature education. The result is their doctrine of centrality. Since some new books and ideas are more central in experience than others, wisdom is not to be found in a specialized library; so, to achieve the end, we must forget established lines in finding these books.

Certainly More's new view of property is anything but Communistic--that the security of property is the first essential duty of a community, that it results in civilization and justice.

Contemporary Humanists have no particular good to say of contemporary literature, although this is partly because they refuse to admit universal qualities that are present. They compare classic tragedy and modern tragedy, for instance, and find that the former elevates but the latter depresses. The Humanists attack Humanitarians as "sentimental, indiscriminate lovers of all humanity in general". The Humanists, believing that God made some things unlovable, are more selective in their doctrines. The conclusion of the Humanists is, then, that in contemporary literature there is a low level of taste, and an over-developed sense of responsibility of humanitarianism.

Naturalism and the general attitude of Determinism (both pessimistic) have grown out of the feeling of defeated Individualism since the World War. The depression has only served to heighten and enlarge their evidences in American thought and literature. Humanism, in the last analysis, will be the answer to Naturalism, Determinism and Defeatism. However,

to be efficacious it must be a Humanism that is tempered by and fitted to the tenor of American thought and life. It must make some concession to the traditional optimism of the country.

Short Stories

In short stories there also has been considerable digging in native material. Fortunately, the formlessness of the 1920's has been followed by a return to a certain amount of restraint. On the other hand, this too has often been carried too far, for freedom in expression is characteristic of the short story: patterns should not be rigid. This restraint has resulted in many writers substituting reporting for imaginative writing.

Let us trace some of the developments in the short story as to subject matter since the depression. During the early years of the crisis, there were many stories of courage in meeting it. These served a good purpose for the lower priced magazines, which the great masses of people read, constitute the sole literary and cultural influences for many. Later, however, people tired of the subject and magazine editors, quick to notice reading trends month by month, changed the predominant type of story. Then the readers took refuge in escape literature.

Such escape stories seemed to have no relation with the economic troubles of the country, but in romantic fashion they were aimed at diverting the

minds of the readers. Editors were very wary about including in their pages realistic stories of the dark days, and better times had to arrive before those yarns were printed.

But finally, social problems have intruded more and more. At present, under the stress of better times, more of the old care-free and luxurious atmosphere has come back. But it would appear that more and more concern is being felt over social problems. Of course, for the most part the stories are all on the same old plots. Romantic patterns have been characteristic of the American short story for some time, and, since periodicals are produced for the masses, editorial direction caters to mass-thinking. A few, however, have published stories that have deviated from the "pattern". But in these, as in the novel, we find the growing social self-consciousness of America to-day.

Short-story treatment has had considerable changes since the depression. Small advertising space forced magazines to cut their pages down, and this meant longer yarns for a while. But then it became the thing to use shorter ones, and more of them, in order to make readers feel they were

getting their money's worth. Recently, the better times have led to a larger magazine, and in some cases to longer stories. However, most of the magazines still cling to the 5,000 word length. The most remarkable trend, however, which carries straight through from 1929 until now, is the greater tightening of plot, and a noticeable increase in pace and tempo in stories generally. In fact, writers who sold freely ten years ago are now out of the running, old-fashioned, and out-of-date, owing to the new insistence upon pace.

It is gratifying, on the one hand, to discover that the traditional concepts of the short story are being questioned and, to a certain extent, abandoned. Recent experimentation with the form at least saves it from the devitalizing effect of fixation and sterility. On the other hand, I am a little disturbed by the fact that a low grade of literacy is often considered no impediment in the way of publication. There are too many writers who have as little regard for beauty of language as they have for stereotyped story patterns. For example, Hemingway and Faulkner, who are not illiterate by a long shot, have fathered a host of bastard illiterates.

Certainly the magazine editors control the short story output. Mr. Quincy Howe, Chief of the Editorial Department of Simon and Schuster, writes that short stories, as a branch of book-publishing shows a consistently poor record. But somewhere between the magazine business and the publishing house comes "Story Magazine", a publication devoted entirely to the best in short stories. One can make definite comparisons between the type of short story found in this magazine and the old kind that ran in "Smart Set" ("Smart Set Anthology"--with an introduction by Burton Rascoe). Miss Meridel Le Sueur in the magazine "Manuscript" writes: "The short story since Katherine Mansfield has been marked by a curious somnambulance of style, geographic removal in space and time, a romantic evasion and psychic equivocation which seems to suggest that life is cruel and bitter and memory is literature". Proceeding to develop her thesis, Miss Le Sueur calls attention to its exemplification in "Story Magazine" and the O'Brien collections. Both Henry Seidel Canby in his "The Study of the Short Story" and Fred L. Pattee in "The Development of the American Short Story" give in historical perspective the changes that have taken place in the short story.

Leslie McFarlane, a Canadian writer, believes the "old commercial types of magazine story are played out", and that the fiction markets are wide open at present. Ten years ago there was a revolutionary and gratifying change in the masses of book readers, whereby a much better sort of book, both fiction and non-fiction, became best sellers. This was due to the bookclubs and to the increased popularity of book reviews in the newspapers. Now improvement in taste has spread to the large-circulation magazines, which were losing ground with machine-made stuff.

"I don't read magazines; what little time I have is for good books", is often heard. Consequently, we find the plotless fiction of Thomas Wolfe in the Saturday Evening Post and in the Red Book. The latter also features Sherwood Anderson and Robert Nathan (his first work to be serialized). By this policy the magazine has added 480,000 circulation in six months.

"Culture is in wide-spread demand", writes Mr. McFarlane. "Bookdom, once an exclusive cult, has been broken wide open, and a good thing too".

As popular as short stories may be in magazines, the American public will not read collection of short stories. Every publisher has discovered this to be

true, except for the rare instance of a humorous collection by an O. Henry or a Ring Lardner. And yet this American public consumes short stories in magazines by hundreds of thousands every year. Henry Seidel Canby has given us an answer. The ordinary short story is a time trap. It is built to snap at the end of a few minutes. This is all right (if you do not mind the artificiality) in a magazine, where you can look at the advertisements between snaps. But in a book the constant percussive is tiresome. And nothing ever really gets told.

But there is another kind of shortish story of which Willa Cather's "Lost Lady" and Edith Wharton's "Ethan Frome" are examples. It is the novelette. Nowadays magazines have been printing complete novelettes in their regular editions. Often they are set in the end of the journals by themselves. Of course, the magazine trade has included them not from any motive of inducing some development into the short-story reader's mentality and taste but for competitive purposes. Nevertheless, it has resulted in some popularity being given to the genre. Some day we may hope for stories as impressive as the Icelandic sagas and the Book of Ruth.

These novelle, to use the Italian word, or

nouvelles, as the French call them, have one theme, one plot, one time and set of circumstances. Their relation to the novel is that of the destroyer to the battleship. They are fast, like the short story, but there is room enough in the hold for plenty of truth. Story Magazine has been the most consistent publication in setting the high standard for this type of story. It is hoped that the variety will bridge the gap between the magazine story and the novel. Already a new book has a collection of five with "The Flying Yorkshireman" by Eric Knight as leader.

I know of no essayist of the first rank who has appeared since 1929. The literary magazines have become more and more expositors of the American scene. We have to look back to the American Mercury in its Mencken-Nathan days for the beginning of this trend. The "literary" or "familiar" essay seems practically to have disappeared from American literature. In the few magazines where it is still found, it is relegated to a comparatively unimportant section of the periodical. In no field of American literature to-day, however, has the trend toward economic and political thinking furnished more of a stimulus to writing than in that of the formal essay, or the article appearing in current magazines. Out of a total of thirty articles examined in recent issues

of three well-known magazines, thirteen were found to deal with matters of economic and financial interest, five with those of political interest.

Poetry and Drama

It is in poetry that the difficulty of ascertaining trends over a brief period of time becomes greatest; the moulding and shaping genius of this form of literature does not always move rapidly or at the will of the author. It can safely be asserted however that the note of sociological interest has been growing in the works of American poets since the War. This is especially noticeable in the poems of Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Carl Sandburg, and Robinson Jeffers.

Sandburg, particularly, has been, and still continues to be, one of the greatest single champions of the "forgotten man". His work also continues to embody his conception of a changing America, an America grown materialistic and machine-minded. Edna St. Vincent Millay is an interesting example of a poet who has changed somewhat in the range of her interests. Her earlier work consisted, for the most part, of an exceedingly personal and lyrical type of verse. Her latest efforts have been more objective in their dealing, even though somewhat Puckishly in "Conversation At Midnight", with the present-day problems of America as well as with those of universal concern. In his narrative and

dramatic verse, Robinson Jeffers presents poetry that has a close contact with life, that shows human nature against a twentieth-century background. The peculiar anti-humanistic attitude of Jeffers is in some way representative of the period, but he seems to me to have no wide hold. T. S. Eliot, tiring no doubt of the negative and cynical post-War verse, has been interested in the necessity of poetry's seeking once more, convictions of some sort, asserting that "the greatest poets have been concerned with moral values". Other robust figures, like Conrad Aiken and Archibald MacLeish, have shown their interest in this perturbed and complex twentieth century.

Ever since 1914 there have been, however, and still continue to be, poets who are more concerned with their individual impressions of, and reactions to, life than with the objective facts themselves. Among these poets belong most of the experimenters of the last fifteen or twenty years. Undoubtedly they have been motivated by the same impulse that led to the literature of escape in the field of prose fiction. A dissatisfaction with the material products of a machine-age still leads them to express themselves, often with beauty, although sometimes a rather tenuous beauty, also with less of the robustness than is found in the

works of the poets mentioned before. It would appear that the poets of this age are faced with the problem of converting and transfiguring, as only poetry can transfigure, the elements of America's present-day civilization into things of poetic beauty, or else seeking a more abstract beauty in a field far removed from these affairs.

Before we examine some American poetry let us just see what chances good poetry has of being produced in depression and post-depression America. Should poets feel at home in the years 1929 to 1938? What is the function of art, in this case poetry, during those years? To this last question we can refer to many answers. Is it a "purging", a "refinement of gross experience", a "Centre of repose"; is it amusement, escape self-expression, or a useful means of inciting people to good actions? I suspect that on occasion it can be any or all of these. However, there is no single theory of the function of poetry that has not finally confined and narrowed and impoverished poetry. In that we except, not even Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Schopenhauer, Mallarmé, Plekhanov, or the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. And yet, I think, they all will agree that

art should have a humanizing function. All good works of literary art have the same fundamental thesis. All of them teach that life is bigger than life--that life as portrayed by the creative imagination is more intense, more varied, more purposeful or lacking in purpose, more tragic or comic, more crowded with events and meanings and yet more harmoniously organized than is the life we have been leading day by day. Sometimes we are discouraged by the contrast and try to escape into a dream world that seems to be, but really is not, the world of the artist. Sometimes we merely contemplate the work of art, gratefully and with a feeling of relief from daily lives in the light of the artist's vision. The new values we derive from his work, when projected into our own experience, are more sharply distinguished from the world of nature, or as Mr. Malcolm Cowley would say, more human.

Now we can carry back to our study of our American poetry a standard. Before a man can feel at home in any surroundings, whether those of seaside or forest, metropolis or factory, he must first transform the objects about him by connecting them with human emotions, by finding their purpose and direction,

by making them understandable. He repeats the same process in the world at large, by perceiving in it architectural and musical forms, unity and rhythm, by giving it a history, and chiefly by transfusing it with imagination. In this the poet gives things names and values and makes them richer and puts in a more communicable fashion.

During the last decade the natural environment has been changing continually--changed by men whose relations with one another also have been changing, together with the means by and the ends for which they live. The American poets of this decade have failed, I believe, to make their world communicable. The world has transformed itself so rapidly as to outrun men's ability to understand it. Many factors have contributed--the rapid development of applied science, power machinery and mass production, the splendour and decay of capitalism, and the growing self-awareness of the proletarian.

Probably the most remarkable piece of American poetry in the last few years has been Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Conversation At Midnight". It certainly is a far cry from Miss Millay's early "personality" poems and structurally true sonnets

to this new poem. It is a sparkling piece of writing, worldly, mature, objective and dramatic; but it is irregular in form and inconclusive in argument. As one critic put it, "It is neither naively philosophical nor philosophically naive". It offers no easy solution in romantic adventure or surrender of protest or disillusion. It does not "sing", it does not always rhyme, it does not delight the senses, and it often offends one's traditional view of taste and poetry. On the other hand, it takes its place in the logic of contemporary poetry.

As a conversation piece its variety of character and repartee are well suited to these times. The time is the present, in New York, the scene is a house on Tenth Street, the hour is after dinner at liqueur-time. The conversationalists are a stock-broker, a painter, a successful short-story writer, a Communist poet, a priest, a young advertising man, and a liberal and agnostic host (Miss Millay herself?). The subjects which they discuss are, in turn, hunting and fishing, women, religion and politics, music, art, story-telling, mutual friends and acquaintances, business, and again politics. There is a dramatic interplay of con-

temporary opinion, neither too ignorant nor too specialized.

The stockbroker Merton is very fairly pictured as a representative of the capitalistic class, wealthy, oldish, energetic, well-read, reasonable but set in his opinions. He engages in heated arguments with the Communist Carl.

Merton says:

Oh, God, why live, to breathe a prescribed and
rationed air! -- All free
Opinion, all interchange of vigorous thought,
suffocated

By the poisonous motor-exhaust of motor minds
Passion regimented; curiosity regimented; endeavour
regimented;
Culture, and grace, and all the things I cared for
Equally divided among the mob, and sauced to their
taste!

And Carl promptly answers:

You, an individual? -- you, you regimented mouse?
You Harvard Club, Union Club, white tie for the
opera, black tie for the theatre,
Trousers legs a little wider this year, sir,
I would suggest dark blue instead of black, sir,

Pumps are no longer worn, sir,
 Mah-Jongg, cross-word, anagram, back-gammon, whist,
 bridge, auction, contract, regimented mouse!
 Why, you're so accustomed to being flanked to right
 and left by people just like yourself
 That if they ever should step aside you couldn't
 stand up!

.....

You, an individual?
 You salad for luncheon, soup for dinner,
 Maine for Summer, Florida for Winter,
 Wife pampering dog-worshipper!

Between these extremes is the patient faith of
 the priest who leaves early, unable to stem or abide
 the rising tide of argument.

Obviously Miss Millay's sympathies are with
 Ricardo, the host, who will hear all sides, hoping
 and waiting for the best, dreading and awaiting
 the worst, but still "certain that his uncertainty
 is the best future for the world"!

Miss Millay's poem takes its place with Ezra
 Pound's "The Bridge", Auden's "The Orators", Wyndham
 Lewis's "One-Way Song", MacLeish's "Frescoes of Mr.
 Rockefeller's City", or with "The Secret" of Arthur

Davidson Ficke (to whom the volume is dedicated) and the "Nightmares" (in "Burning City") of Stephen Vincent Benét. All of these have given up the narrow and personal "dictatorship" of the lyric and have attempted to give poetry a meaning beyond their pleasure in sound and sense affect. Miss Millay did this before in her poems of social protest but always with herself as protagonist. "Conversation" is a participation in the contemporary intelligence rather than a considered partition of herself from it. It is witty and stylized free verse, and does make its point as a poem of our times in accurately rendering the stress and distress of our present living.

Harry Hansen believes, and "Conversation at Midnight" and the others would bear him out, that modern poetry in touching the social theme is becoming more related to drama than verse. This is a thesis that should be studied with particular reference to Archibald MacLeish's poetry.

One of the best analysis of the trend of the present-day American I found was "More Power to Poets" by Lucia Trent and Edward Ralph Cheney. They are more sympathetic toward the experimenters than

most of us are inclined to be, however. In times of strife, poets should be given even added encouragement. Certainly the publishing houses are doing their share. For instance, the recent catalogue of the Viking Press books contained these titles of "distinguished verse in many moods": "The Melancholy Lute" by Franklin P. Adams; "The Flowering Stone" by George Dillion; James Weldon Johnson's "Saint Peter Relates An Incident" and "God's Trombones"; "Two Lives" by William Ellery Leonard; "Poems" by Wilfred Owen; "Lawrence: the Last Crusade" by Seldon Rodman; "Vigils" by Siegfried Sassoon; James Still's "Hounds on the Mountain"; "Winged Child" by Jean Starr Untermeyer; "A Spectacle for Scholars" by Winifred Welles; "Landscape with Figures" by Lionel Wiggam. Of course, a great many foreign writers are included in the above but their large market is the U. S. A.

The other night I talked to Wilson MacDonald, the Canadian poet, who is popular in the United States, about American poets. He told me that there has been no major one since Edwin Arlington Robinson. Charles Powell, a Manchester Guardian critic who specializes in dealing with new poetry,

finds that the general level of achievement in this field is "depressingly depressed". He says that the volume which has done most to redeem the yield of 1937 is by England's official poet, John Masefield: namely, "The Country Scene".

Percy Hutchinson of the New York Times says that we are prone to talk about literature which is representative of America, when actually such a thing is impossible. We are forgetting that the country is so vast, represents locally so many different stems that the best that one can expect is American locale. For that reason he praises James Still, and American poet of the mountain scene. Mr. Still writes of foxes and rabbits, not because they strike him as subjects for objective verse, but because they are his neighbours, as are the sycamores and the flowers of the surrounding fields. His language is the homespun of his ancestors, the warp from Chaucer, the woof cut out of the English Bible. Paul Engle's "American Song" and Christopher La Farge's "Hoxie Sells His Acres" both have the theme of particular locale. Here then is regionalism in poetry--and according to Percy Hutchinson, it is a particularly suitable angle of interpret-

ation for American poetry.

An interesting book of poetry is that edited by Ann Winslow, Executive Secretary of the College Poetry Society of America, "Trial Balance^S". It is the best work of thirty-two of the youngest American poets from the colleges and universities. The poems are appraised by thirty-two established poets, critics, and editors--Stephen Vincent Benet, Walter Byrne, Malcolm Cowley, Louise Bogan, Hildegard Flanner, et al. In many of them I noticed an intellectual quality that suggests some may develop into greater stature. The precision of imagery is particularly delightful in a few.

However, the American traditional regard toward poetry has never been of a very high level, although poetry of some sort has been popular. Edgar Guest might be mentioned here in passing. Alexander Woollcott, the newspaper columnist, also lately has been encouraging the popular side of poetry in his "Desk Drawer Anthology". The volume is the result of 40,000 verses submitted from all over the country at the radio request of Woollcott. Poems from newspapers and magazines--of charm, of pathos, of irony--came out of thousands of desk drawers of Woollcott's

editors. Many were duplicated by scores of people. Here is the editor's own comment: "Here are the poems for the American poets. This is the poetry which lies closest to American hearts. It is as American as Indian Corn".

Need I say more for contemporary American Poetry?

Incidentally T. S. Eliot has recently made some very interesting comments upon poetry in the modern world. While declining to go into the general question of political influence on poetry, Mr. Eliot remarks that the arts are not particularly favoured just now by certain political tendencies abroad. He adds the significant fact that he finds it more difficult to-day than it was thirteen years ago to come across interesting writers from several foreign countries to which he refers as the dictator countries. There is not the same difficulty with France, England and the United States. Mr. Eliot thinks that although the poetry-buying public is not large, there is a much greater amount of interesting poetic activity in England and the United States than there was during the first decade of the century. As to the ability to enjoy poetry, Mr. Eliot believes it

to be widespread. You sometimes find a natural sensitiveness to the real thing in people from whose background and lack of education you might not expect it. So perhaps Alexander Woollcott's collection is not such a terrifying piece of American poetical evidence after all.

I intend to touch only lightly on the drama. The drama, outside of New York, is, I believe, in a healthy condition, in that it has everything to gain and nothing to lose by growing. The theatre racket in New York has developed into such a state that it is too expensive to allow for growth and experiment. The moving picture industry, blindly opposing the living theatre as a business rival, has bought or leased every theatre building in the provinces and allows, under no circumstance, stage shows. This has resulted in the complete isolation, so far as New York is concerned, of the drama for the provinces. The consequent turn has been the founding of thousands of community amateur theatrical projects, where people not trained in the traditional theatre experiment and produce shows that are frequently ingenious and sometimes startling.

Certain names are more importantly associated

with the drama of our periods than others--Clifford Odets, Sidney Kingsley, Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Howard, and Helen Jerome. All are tinged to various degrees by the same movements that affected the novel. The problem play has tackled broader problems and become propaganda. Perhaps Odets and Kingsley have been the most artistic in their handling of plot, character and setting. Odets wrote "Awake and Sing", "Waiting for Lefty" and "Till the Day I Die", Maxwell Anderson's "Winterset" and Sidney Kingsley's "Street Scene", "Men in White", a Pulitzer prize winner, and "Dead End". In 1936 Sidney Howard and Paul de Kruif wrote "Yellow Jack", a drama of medicine, about which Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times at the time said, "It introduces a new and invigorating quality into our contemporary drama". In the same year Albert Maltz's "Black Pit" was produced, portraying the propaganda of a mining group. Paul Peters and George Sklar also propagandised in "Stevedore". This time the action was concerned with a race riot in New Orleans. Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road" is a mass of blasphemous utterances but frankly tells the wrongs of the Kentucky tobacco

crop-system.

The popularity that has held for proletarian drama has not touched the similar type in fiction. Harry Hansen of the New York World-Telegram believes that dramatic writing has shown unusual virility and gained great support chiefly because a play on social subject also permits the audience to vent its feeling.

One of the most important figures in contemporary American drama is Maxwell Anderson. The most striking thing he has done in my opinion is to bring poetry into the contemporary American life in such plays as "Winterset". This acceptance of poetry on the stage has some significance and shows a desire to break away from what has been the prevailing realism.

Only a year ago the theatregoers wanted no truck with anything that was sombre. This year the three most popular plays along Broadway concern the assassination of an emperor by a group of his friends, a tragic death in the prize ring followed by a fatal automobile accident, and the sad lot of a man who has to shoot his chum to save him from lynchers. The plays are "Julius Caesar", Clifford Odet's "Golden Boy", and John Steinbeck's "Of Mice

and Men". Perhaps it is the excitement, found in the trio of hits, which draws the crowds, rather than the tragic implications. The murder of Caesar is a little remote to win weepers and Mark Antony's rabble-rousing funeral sermon is played as a bit of fustian.

Clifford Odets first made his dramatic mark in "Waiting for Lefty", the most powerful and persuasive propaganda play which the labour movement has yet inspired in America. After two more plays in somewhat the same mood Odets was sent to Hollywood. He managed to escape and come back to his associates, but he now shows something of the studio pallor. "Golden Boy" is built up a little with gag lines and to some extent the author has pasted a moral on to a melodrama as a kind of postscript. His final message is that it is better to save your own soul than to win the lightweight boxing crown.

There can be no questioning of the fact that John Steinbeck's motivating force in "Of Mice and Men" is one of pity, compassion and understanding for those who work the land and yet never grasp any tiny section of it for their own. Here he is on solid ground for man's love of the good earth is a

universal theme. If the play misses being completely compelling, it is because the dramatist becomes a special pleader rather than a factual reporter. He appears before the jury not as a witness but as an eloquent counsel. It is only in weak cases that sentimental summations are needed. Steinbeck might have written a somewhat less successful play with a more humdrum plot, but it might have been more profound in its appeal. (Of course, not having seen the play, I am basing this criticism on the book and on what I have read in New York newspapers). After all, the tragic fate of Lennie the moronic toiler, does not lie wholly in his economic status but in the fortuitous circumstances that he becomes the innocent victim of a wanton's wiles. Steinbeck's formula, much like that in his other books, is to celebrate the companionship of two wandering harvest workers. One is keen and self-sufficient and the other is feeble-witted but strong of hand. They are bound together by a compact to get a little place of their own. Steinbeck knows the men of whom he writes.

In an early criticism of the play, Heywood Brown wrote: "Not since the days of ^{the} ~~What~~ Price

Glory⁹ has the American language marched with greater majesty and eloquence in the theatre".

Shakespeare is a still successful playwright. As Variety, the Broadway theatrical weekly, summed it up, "Shakespeare B'way's In--'n' Outer--'Caesar' Clicks, 'Cleo', 'Like' Cold". If you are unfamiliar with the code, it may be explained that this means neither "As You Like It" nor "Antony and Cleopatra" were successful this season, but that "Julius Caesar" is sensational. This triumph may be attributed in part to the fact that the emperor is dressed like Mussolini and that the tragedy is put forward with fast pace upon a large stage. Nevertheless, most of the credit still remains with Shakespeare.

George Jean Nathan usually has the last word to say on American drama, and this time it is in his new book "The Morning After the First Night". Mr. Nathan flays many hides in this new volume of picturesque prose--critics, actors, playwrights, producers, authors--and, as usual, gives every evidence of enjoying the work. One of his most heated arguments is that too much New York theatre criticism is rank pussyfooting. President of the New York Drama Critics Circle, Mr. Nathan corrects

his colleagues whom he considers overpolite. He has no patience with writers on the theatre who are kind to those productions sometimes classified as "harmless". He demands that plays be criticized not from the point of view of the competition they are up against but "from the point of view of the very proudest and highest standards of all plays in a like category".

"The American theatre", lashes forth Mr. Nathan, "is the most promisingly vital in the world, and it is a bullwhip that will keep it so, not a heart of gold. The one justification for the trade of drama criticism is to criticize drama and not merely apologize for it. And the only way to judge and criticize drama is to do the job from the top down rather than from the bottom up. Critics who do not agree to this are sheep in wolf's clothing, parasites whose ba-bas and howls are insulting to all concerned".

In conclusion, the best comment I can make on contemporary American poetry is to quote Shelley. What Shelley said of his own age can be applied more truly to ours: "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the poetry of life; our calculations have outrun our conception; we have eaten more than we can digest."

To-day we have been in, for sometime, a period when artists of Shelley's stature are vastly more necessary than scientists or engineers.

Biography

Another fact that cannot be ignored in any consideration of American literature in this decade is that the years since 1930 have yielded what might be called a "bumper crop" in autobiographies and memoirs. In the earlier part of the decade there appeared the works of Lincoln Steffens, Isadore Duncan, Emma Goldman; later than these, the books of Will Duranty, Vincent Sheean, Negley Farson, Upton Sinclair, Max Eastman--to mention only a few. Why did all these writers feel such a strong necessity for this kind of self-expression? One reason, perhaps, may be seen in the fact that the new type of biography has been increasingly popular since the War. Another reason may, possibly, connect these works with economic conditions since the depression; that is, the tendency to reveal self, to emphasize the individual, may have been the result of a subtle, hidden and perhaps semi-conscious desire to resist the encroachments of a civilization in which standardization and mass-thinking appear to loom so large.

The last ten years have been marked by careful, painstaking work in biography, scholarly rather than

critical. It is not to be associated with the "biography of detraction" of the 1920's, which originated in revaluation and then was run into commercial success by sensationalism. Francis Brown of the New York Times has written me the best criticism of the recent trend in biography. Take for example, he says, Swisher's life of Chief Justice Taney. Taney has always been a neglected figure in American history, a man generally remembered, and criticized, for his Dred-Scott decision on the eve of the Civil War. The Swisher book appeared about two years ago. It shows Taney in a new light, as a liberal fighting to place human rights above property rights, as a man whose problems nearly a century ago were similar to the problems facing many American liberals to-day. Such an interpretation, Mr. Brown suspects, would have been impossible fifty years ago. But the current liberalism in the United States made the interpretation possible, ~~made~~ it possible also for readers to appreciate Taney for what he seems to have been.

Again, a few months ago a new life of Andrew Jackson by Marquis James appeared. Here also the liberalism of the old war-horse is stressed.

It always had been perhaps, but this time it seems to have a reality, a meaning that had previously been lacking. Perhaps it is a case of the present generation rewriting history, even as generations are supposed to do.

In some of the more popular books on American history and biography the feeling of the 1930's is apparent. The writers, if conservatives, seek to interpret American history to suit their cause; if liberals, they do the reverse. Compare Claude Bowers and James Truslow Adams, for example. To Arthur Bryant, English critic, however, this matter of shaded interpretations is but a minor fault in American Biography. The only ray of light he can discern in the gloom of American writing comes to him when he observes the comparatively high quality of contemporary biography and autobiography--a class of literature, by the way, to which this critic is himself a distinguished contributor. In this field alone, he declares, can the present age claim that it is producing literature that has a stamp of its own and that is better than the work of the age preceding it.

On the other hand, Desmond McCarthy, critic in

the London Sunday Times, is rather pessimistic in his survey of this class of books. Among the biographies he has been reading, several had considerable merits, but there was not one born of really intimate union between biographer and subject. Some of them added to our knowledge; some set our previous knowledge at a new angle; some were informative but barely readable; others were extremely readable but ignored many important facts. One and all they could be superseded. Indeed, some were only justified as helping a subsequent writer to supersede them. Personally, I feel that this is a sour-grapes criticism and of no real value.

I believe the factual outlook of the reading public has fostered a new interest in biography, autobiography and records of travel. The moon, the stars, fireside meditations, careful workmanship and the music of words, the art of writing for its own sake have been abandoned for the time being. Almost all the good books of the year, and almost all the widely read books, are about facts.

John Hall Wheelock, Editor of Charles Scribner's, writes me that biography as a depression best-seller should come under books of the escape variety. If (*see p. 161*)

this is so, then it is a counter-argument to the point of fact interest in the paragraph above. Mr. Wheelock believes biography offers release from the ills and threat of difficult times. Probably both explanations are correct to a degree--that interest in biography has definite relationship with the depression.

Another explanation for current interest in biography is the entertaining compromises with fact that the modern biographer allows. This is known as the reconstruction method, where detail in biography and history, dialogue, and descriptive minutae are added. It is putting meat on the skeleton, just as an anthropologist does. Professor Oman at Oxford justifies it by saying, "The student of an epoch has to reconstruct when research fails to lead to historically recorded facts". This reconstruction method is different from that practiced by Emile Ludwig, who frequently completely resets historical characters and situations in his attempted psychological interpretations to such an extent that he frequently borders on fiction. André Maurois was responsible for the reconstruction device.

Let us examine some of the biographical and autobiographical titles of the last few years. In 1935 "The Thought and Character of William James" by Ralph Barton Perry won the Pulitzer prize. It is a collection of letters by the philosopher, carried on a clever running interpretative commentary. The late Clarence Day's "Life With Father" is a charming biography, not without gaiety because of its irony. Henry Seidel Canby's autobiographical "Alma Mater" was also a well-read book. In 1936 an autobiography headed the best-seller lists for months--Dr. Victor Heiser's "An American Doctor's Odyssey". It is a biography of piquant character by an expert on tropical diseases, who has made sixteen trips around the world on behalf of the Rockefeller Institute. He has taken adventure with a frolic welcome wherever it met him and his book is packed full of incidents and anecdotes of liveliest sort. It makes excellent reading and has the added advantage of being a chronicle rich in the experience that is of value to science.

Of course, current personalities have come in for their share. Out of the list, I might mention Konrad Heiden's "Hitler", Ledecke's "I Knew Hitler", and George Selde's "Sawdust Caesar" (Mussolini).

Other first rate biographies have been: Elswyth Thané's "The Young Mr. Disraeli", Eve Curie's "Madame Curie", Eleanor Roosevelt's "This Is My Story", Van Gogh's autobiography "Dear Theo", Winston Churchill's "Great Contemporaries", George Santayana's "The Last Puritan", Rose Hawthorne Lathrop's "Sorrow Built A Bridge" (daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne), V. Sackville-West's amazing memoir of her own family, "Pepita", Mrs. Natalie Sedgwick Collby's revealing "An American Life", Volume VI of Ray Stannard Baker's monumental life and letters of Woodrow Wilson, Lincoln Ellsworth's autobiography of Michael Collins, the leader in the bloody Irish Revolution. In the field of current affairs are books, partly autobiographical in character, by such authors as Kate O'Brien in her memoir of Spain in revolt and Spain as she loved it, "Farewell, Spain", and Elliot Paul in "The Life and Death Of A Spanish Town".

The last decade of American literature has not produced great biography, in the sense that Boswell created it, or great autobiography in the manner of Gibbon, but it has to its credit a large

volume of unquestionably original biographical and autobiographical achievement.

LITERARY PRISES

The old problem of how far a writer produces material "for art's sake" and ignores the commercial consideration of market is always a difficult one. Particularly so is it eminent in the period under consideration. Do successful writers make compromises with their artistic ideals when they consider the intended publisher or audience? I have often felt that at times one author has injected liberal doses of realism into a novel after he had it written, solely to meet the anticipated demands of the general reader for the occasional, entertaining spice. On the other hand, it might have been added in a competitive spirit--to outdo some other author's work ~~that~~ had been successful.

Sex might be taken as a typical market device. If an author has succeeded with a novel in which sex played some part and failed with a previous book ~~that~~ had none of the elements, it is permissible to suppose that his third book will contain a goodly percentage of the spice. During the twenties most successful stories had wide-open attitudes and disgusting extremes frequently brought all general literature into disrepute. From the depression on and through the period of despondency and complete

futility, I do not think the use of sex was considered in marketable terms. It was just another side to the eternal question, "Well, what good is anything anyway?" Of course, it may be argued that when the writers were hard-hit by the depression and had their royalties cut they were willing to make compromise in their literary production. With the return to better times, there has been a decided tendency to play down or suppress sex and sexual irregularities as a mainspring in the human relationships of fiction. Now whether this is because of a trend away from the despair philosophy of the depression or an easing of the lately tense competition for markets, I am not prepared to say with authority. I do not believe that the first reason is the more likely. "The Seven Who Fled", by Frederic Prokosch, one of the best-sellers of 1937-38 and a Harper Prize novel might be evidence contrary to the statement, but I think that book has won through its own general ~~challenge~~ ^{appeal} and not because of the device of sex.

Certainly, however, we can be safe in saying that most writers do write with a desire to make a financial as well as a literary success. The literary prize as royalty cheque is an important

consideration to those who live by their works. But a special kind of reward that has developed during our time, until now it stands as an important catalyst in the chemistry of book-writing, is the actual Literary Prize. The foundation of these contests coincides with the increasing popularity of reading. Their revenues have helped to liberate authors from commercial competition, and their recognition is, in a general sense, the equivalent of what the laurel wreath meant to the Greek and what royal or Medici patronage meant to the Renaissance artist or poet. Cash, it seems, is the most satisfying reward an industrial world can bestow; it is our most powerful stimulant for new enterprise.

The greatest present-day exponent of the literary prize is Mr. Edwin Weeks, Editor-in-Chief of the Atlantic Monthly magazine and author of "This Trade of Writing." It was his organization, in conjunction with Little, Brown and Co., Boston, that commenced a sponsoring device that since has been followed by other publishing companies, universities and colleges, clubs, etc. Naturally, some effects upon the nation's literature have resulted. But, as we shall see later, the awarding of literary prizes has vaster considerations than a high-minded and missionary-like stimulus to literary production.

What part have prizes played in the literature of other periods and countries? In the literature of the nineteenth century there was very little. Certain honours, it is true, were reserved for the mature few; in England a gentle pasture was apportioned to that elderly browser, the Poet Laureate; there was an occasional title conferred upon a writer at the Birthday and New Year's Day Honours, and in a pinch there were grants--Samuel Johnson long hoped for one in a century earlier--bestowed by king or wealthy patron upon an author in need. But such endowments were very rare. And in the United States they took the more indirect form of sinecures. (What sort of post would the present administration give to a well-meaning author who bedevilled the Washington merry-go-round in a series of fictional exposures?) Nathaniel Hawthorne was made consul at Liverpool; Herman Melville sought a similar appointment to relieve his financial worries, and even as recently as 1904 you will find President Theodore Roosevelt placing Edwin Arlington Robinson in the Customs Office as a means "of encouraging the poetry to come."

But the writers of the nineteenth century, writers whom we now classify under the tag of "Victorian",

seldom secured such relief. They found hope in the fact that the reading public was steadily widening, they sighed with relief when in the 1880's the passage of copyright laws put an end to pirated editions, and they were thankful for the serialization of their work, indicating, as it did, a fresh source of earned income. But cash rewards were left out of their reckoning.

The first literary prizes to appear in the twentieth century were without any stigma of commercialism: the Nobel Prizes in Sweden, the Prix Goncourt and the Prix Gémina in France, the Hawthornden Prize in England, the Pulitzer Prizes in the United States, however they might qualify the age, nationality, and subject matter of the author, were, broadly speaking, rewards in recognition of literary excellence.

The Nobel Prizes perpetuate the memory and wealth of Alfred Bernhard Nobel, a Swedish inventor whose fortune was made by his discovery of dynamite in 1865-1866. As if to counteract the danger of some of his inventions, his will provided as beneficent a series of gifts as could well be imagined. As his fortune enlarged so did the idea of his bequest.

The Prix Goncourt, since its first award in 1903, has proved to be the most exciting, the most coveted plum in France. It goes almost invariably to a young French writer and its influence is more marked than the citations which the French Academy bestows upon the mossbacks. The most valuable literary prizes in England are the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Hawthornden Prize and they too are national.

In America the Pulitzer Prize is also national, in being confined to American Authors. In 1926 they awarded the novel prize to "Arrowsmith" by Sinclair Lewis. Mr. Lewis is a realist who quite occasionally sees life as through a glass darkly. He is also a redhead and it irked him to think that his work should be conformed to any set formula. His rejection of the award followed quickly upon the heel of the original announcement and he explained his reasons in the Publishers' Weekly of May 8:

"I wish (so wrote Mr. Lewis to the Pulitzer Prize committee) to acknowledge your choice of my novel 'Arrowsmith' for the Pulitzer Prize. That prize I must refuse, and my refusal would be meaningless unless I explained the reason.

All prizes, like all titles, are dangerous. The seekers for prizes tend to labour not for

inherent excellence but for alien rewards; they tend to write this, or timorously to avoid writing that, in order to tickle the prejudices of a haphazard committee. And the Pulitzer Prize for Novels is peculiarly objectionable because the terms of it have been constantly and grievously misrepresented.

These terms are that the prize shall be given 'for the American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American manners and manhood'. This phrase, if it means anything whatever, would appear to mean that the appraisal of the novels shall be made not according to their actual literary merit but in obedience to whatever code of good form may chance to be popular at the moment.

Only by regularly refusing the Pulitzer Prize can novelists keep such a power from being permanently set up over them.

I invite other writers to consider the fact that by accepting the prizes and approval of these vague institutions, we are admitting their authority publicly confirming them as the final judge of literary excellence, and I inquire whether any prize is worth that subservience."

Whatever the provocation, the wording which

defined the Pulitzer Prize Novel was subsequently changed. That fiction award is now intended for "The best novel published during the year by an American author, preferably dealing with American life."

Writing on August 8, 1935, Mr. Lewis comments on his own letter:

"I still think this is a reasonable comment on prizes in general, although I do think that the standard of freedom in the judging of novels for the Pulitzer Prize has vastly improved in the nine years since 1926, when I wrote the above." Certainly 'Now in November' by Josephine Johnson was an admirable choice."

We notice Mr. Lewis had no thought of declining the Nobel Prize when it came his way some years later. The Nobel Prize is the greatest honour in contemporary world of letters. It favours no nationality and takes into account not one book but the entire range of a writer's work.

Here we can state what literary prizes do: they single out an author who might otherwise be neglected. They beat the drum for him, they remind you that here's a man whose book you can't afford to miss. In the first eleven months of its publication, a first novel

"New in November", by Josephine Johnson, sold approximately 10,000 copies. During the forty-eight hours following its selections for the Pulitzer Prize the publishers received 9,000 reorders.

No one not in the trade can have a fair idea of the battle of books. The competition between authors is more fierce, more unrelenting, to-day than ever I can think of. America is a network of Grub Streets. Democracy did not complete its education when it trained the crowd how to read. Once you begin to relish books you are tempted to write them. And there's the rub! Despite the lean years since 1930, despite the reduction in office force, despite the recognized and drastic decline in book buying, American publishers cannot bring themselves to issue less than approximately 5,000 new and different titles every year. If a college graduate consumes twenty-five in a twelve month he's doing better than average. Do these figures balance?

There is evidently a crying need for emphasis and selection. The point is that literary prizes made their appearance at a time when more books were being written than the public could possibly enjoy, at a time when some selective, or, if you like, some exterminating process was urgently needed

by the casual reader, and--for this is equally patent--at a time when the industry of writing had become so overpopulated that writers were unable to secure a decent recognition, much less a good butter-and-eggs livelihood. A substantial cash prize, you see, had the effect of making almost everybody happy: deserving new literature was set apart for immediate attention; the reader was given an incentive to buy and talk about a book such as he never experienced before, and the author was given not only a feather for his cap but a bank roll nearly sufficient to pay his debts.

A theatrical producer or an editor knows that not until the public begins to talk about his play or his book is success definitely in sight. "Word-of-mouth advertising", like sex appeal or an infectious laugh, is something money cannot buy. It goes without saying that people will talk about a prize winner. Perhaps it is the perversity in us that sets us to finding fault the moment we hear that someone or something is acknowledged as extraordinary.

Prize in fiction is said to prompt reorders from thirty to sixty thousand copies. "Well," thinks your ambitious editor, "why not award a prize of our own: we'll consult some nonpartisan judges, we'll

grade the candidates as fairly as possible, and we'll have at least one book on our list that the public will want to read." Thus by a logical step literary prizes passed into commerce. We have to-day prize contests for short stories, for first novels, for mystery stories and for non-fiction, for manuscripts which are to be serialized, published, translated, dramatized, broadcast and finally dumped into Hollywood. Almost all the major publishing houses offer annual prizes for some literary effort or other-- Little, Brown (Atlantic Monthly), Viking Press, Harpers, Houghton-Mifflin, Doubleday-Doran, et al. The Book-of-the-month Club and Literary Guild are, in effect, awarding a prize when they pick the monthly "selections." How much of this latter device is a fair appraisal of new M. S. and how much a tie-up with the "right" publishing houses will be discussed later.

However, Mr. Weeks assures us that in a literary competition, when the time comes to argue the merits of two books, the question is not, "Which will sell the best?" but simply, "Which is the more interesting, the more distinctive book?"

The initial distinction between literary awards and publishers' prizes is simple enough. The first

is a recognition of achievement, the second, a stimulant to evoke the best work procurable. Literary awards in most cases are conferred upon writers of established reputation; publishers' prizes, on the other hand, are much more apt to single out new writers of promise.

I think Mr. Lewis is right when he asserts that all prizes are "dangerous". In the case of literary awards there is always the danger that the honour may become too sanctified, the definition of the committee too pompous. In the case of the publishers' prizes there is the danger--an insistent one to-day--that too much may be expected of the prize-winning book. It is one thing to offer a prize for a book of whatever subject. But in my judgment it is more difficult and much more fallacious to hold out a prize for a manuscript which will be at once a good book, a good magazine serial, a good plot for a play, and a good scenario for Hollywood. When prize offers are put together representing those four industries the chances are four to one that Hollywood will win. You may get an exciting yarn, but the chances are four to one that it will not be literature. Such dangers must be clear enough to any reflective reader. But to say that a thing is dangerous is not to say

that it is essentially bad.

Literary awards and publishers' prizes both, it seems to me, have proved their worth. In a time of overproduction they have provided us with a much-needed method of selection. More often rightly than wrongly, they have held up for the public's regard a book to read; not infrequently they have been the means of discovering genuine talent. Prizes, I think, are the best form of patronage surviving in a democratic world of letters.

THE PUBLISHER'S VIEWPOINT

Perhaps the most valuable part of this thesis is the research material I gained from various American publishing houses. After all, the editors and their staff of readers are the people who, in the final analysis, determine what the literature of the United States shall be, if not always what it should be. To these men, in two cases the presidents of companies, I am indebted for their letters and information, not only for their personal opinions upon current American literature but also for the explanation, often detailed, of their companies policies.

In presenting the initial problem of the publisher we quote Mr. Curtice N. Hitchcock of the firm of Reynal and Hitchcock who says:

"Books with their suggestion of leisure and the contemplative life, seem almost an anomaly in a world of action, harrassed and able apparently only to leap breathlessly from one excitement to another without pausing to think. Those of us who are concerned with the production of books, whether as writers or

as promoters, may well wonder occasionally whether we are not fully as isolated from reality as those earlier book makers, the medieval monastics, who quarantined themselves behind stone walls from the rude struggle outside and wrote and published for a private circulation up and down the corridors between their cells.

"I suspect, however, that the implications of the analogy are false. Even in those times new ideas, generated in the cloister and laboriously developed on parchment, had an uncanny way of sneaking out over the top of the wall in the dead of night and rising up from nowhere months or years or even centuries later to the discomfiture of some rhinoceros-hided warrior who could not even read, much less understand, the words in which they were expressed. To-day, with large parts of the world open to a far freer permeation of those disintegrating microbes, the possibilities of the printed word are rightly taken even more seriously.

"And so, in the midst of racketeers and motor accidents, of wars abroad and labour struggles at home, of stock-market slumps and trust litigation, the book trade remains surprisingly cheerful and lively, feeling that in its own way it has a rightful share in the march of events and a modest chance to influence all of them. Feeling, despite the attractions of movies, radios, magazines and newspapers, and other large scale competitors for attention, that it has a unique function and with its faults and inadequacies, it can afford, while borrowing a little here and there from all its rivals, still to remain confidently itself."

Another problem as to what editorial leadership actually amounts to has been pointed out to me by Mr. Cass Canfield, President of Harper & Brothers. Tired moments are a luxury which the publisher cannot often afford because he must be constantly on the lookout for the unusual. Then, if he is worth his salt, he realizes that he will

never know what the public wants. He may draw some conclusions about public taste from past experience, but if an attempt is made to do this on the basis of a formula he is lost. At times he may believe that certain trends in reading are discernible, but that theory cannot be pushed too far, for the public is interested in ideas, in stories, or in beauty of style, but certainly not in trends. It remains for the critic and student to determine the trends.

For example, just when it was generally accepted that no one wanted to read anything more about the Russian emigré, along came "The Education of a Princess" by the Grand Duchess Marie. When the public was supposed to be tired of war books, "All Quiet on the Western Front" sold by the hundreds of thousands. The long, colourful, historical novel, essentially a throw-back to the taste of the Nineties, made appearances on the best of best-selling lists at a time when publishers had accepted the theory that the public was looking for rapidly told, realistic novels about life in the present. One could multiply such examples endlessly. Therefore, any experienced publisher knows that he must be slow to decide what the public wants, and should, instead,

"wait on the corner with one eye on the public and the other on that unknown author who will break all records for the year".

In spite of the technical knowledge required for the manufacture and distribution of books, publishing is not essentially a technical enterprise. The publishing of popular books, whether light or serious, provides quite as much excitement for the publisher as for the reader. There is perhaps an even livelier pleasure for the discerning in the recognition of new talent, or a new idea, before others have become aware of it. A literary sportsman prefers his birds on the wing and his trout on the fly.

There is a lesson here for authors as well, for the writer who watches his market too carefully will certainly fail as an artist and in most cases will not appeal to the readers he has so carefully counted.

According to Mr. Canfield the fascination of the whole business of writing, editing, producing and selling books is that every man or woman is a potential author or publisher. For each one of us has in him something of the gambler, something of

the artist or at least an appreciation of art, and some interest in other human beings and what they are thinking about.

I presume that book publication has two main aspects. For the great majority, perhaps, it is an entertainment industry, producing best-sellers for the pleasure of hundreds of thousands, occasionally even millions, of people, who find in the novel or book of adventure much the same kind of escape from reality as that provided by the motion picture. It can further claim the additional merit that the quiet enjoyment of books tends to develop understanding of historical events and of human motives and emotions more readily than any other forms of communication. Indeed, they have influenced as well as recorded history.

The second, and probably more socially important, aspect of the world of books lies in its function as a testing ground for ideas. It is not too much to claim that men and women who have anything worthwhile to say have more opportunity to say it in the way they wish in the American book market than anywhere else in the world, and with more freedom now than at any time in the past.

Books in modern America are less restricted, whether by law or custom or other forms of pressure, than any other form of popular communication. As a result the publisher has always the possibility of finding in book form, perhaps in a small and modest volume which only sells in an edition of a thousand or so, a theory or a plan which may alter radically some vital human institution in the next generation. The point is most evident in the field of politics, where the tough-minded can immerse themselves in the bold books in red and white and intermediate uniforms which battle up and down the shelves over the issue of human rights. Here is a clear field with no favour, and no one is shot upholding his version of the truth. But the same freedom and the same expectancy holds true not only with politics and economics but with science and art and religion and all other human interests.

So it is that the reader of contemporary literature with his senses attuned to the winds which are now blowing through the world may gain some fresh awareness of the battle of ideas which provides the spice of our mental life. It may be through the discovery of a new and brilliant novel

just breaking into prominence; it may be through a sudden flash of intention with respect to some new philosophical discovery.

To Mr. John Hall Wheelock of Scribner's and Mr. Quincy Howe of Simon and Schuster, Inc., I am indebted for some trade facts which have a direct bearing on my study. From 1918 to 1928, inclusive, an average of 7,000 new trade book titles were published in the United States, with an estimated average annual sale of more than fifty million dollars. In spite of the decline of '32, '33 and '34, the average trade book production from 1930 to 1937 ran to more than 8,000 titles per year, an increase of twelve per cent. The average annual sale, however, for the period was much less--thirty million dollars to forty million dollars, a decrease of at least twenty per cent. At the lowest point it is estimated that the sale of books fell off fifty per cent.

In the year 1930 a sharp change took place, due to the diminishing power of the growth of rental libraries and readers turned in greater numbers to public libraries. Hundreds of odd-priced reprints were published and the bookseller had a bad time.

Books were featured as "loss leaders" in department stores and price-cutting became general.

Since 1929, Scribner's have found that economic and sociologic books have been in greater demand than usual. There has been a falling off of interest in the serious realistic novel, in serious verse and in the older standard books. Of course, the most conspicuous trend since 1929 has been the preference of the book-buying public for the literature of escape; after fiction, biography, books of economics and sociology, history, travel, inspirational, and such books, on the whole, as offer release from the ills and threat of difficult times.

Simon and Schuster have always done rather better with non-fiction than with fiction, and Quincy Howe, chief of their editorial department, believes that the whole trend in recent years has been in that direction. Yet it so happens that during the past year the firm has published four successful novels--at least twice as many, that is, as they published in any previous year. Drama, poetry and short stories have shown a consistently poor record.

The trend that Mr. Howe has noticed toward non-fiction is probably even more pronounced than the

sales indicate, because the demand for serious books on politics and economics at public libraries has increased even more rapidly than the sales of those books have increased to the general public. The reason, of course, is that such books command a rather higher price than fiction. As noted above, another factor for the publisher is the lending library. For instance, most detective stories sell between two and four thousand copies, but they reach many more readers than that per copy, because they are published almost exclusively for the lending library trade.

A new concern called Modern Age Books, which is experimenting with paper-bound books priced at 25, 35 and 75 cents, has found a wide market for labour books. Here again price is the explanation. The average wage-earner cannot afford two or three dollars for a book, but he can afford thirty-five cents.

All along the line, both in subject matter and in price, the successful books of recent years and the general trend in reading, so far as the publishers see it, can be explained by events in the surrounding world.

As one editor at Doubleday, Doran & Co., writes,

"Custom has changed publishing, and a good publisher's list now includes books for every taste and for every mood. It should achieve interest, pace and balance. It should reflect the times and current trends in books. Each title should be chosen for its individual value in the field in which it belongs, and also for its integrity within the list as a whole. The publisher should rise to the challenges and demands of the time. For instance, the problem of format has become a renewed one with publishers since the depression, in that the return of the long novel has been a striking feature of book-publishing within the last few years".

During 1937 the American reader of fiction had thirty-six new novels each week from which to choose. This is one of the facts revealed by the Publishers' Circular. Almost every other class of publication reports a similar increase. In commenting on these statistics, the Publishers' Circular refuses to endorse the frequent protests against the alleged

excessive number of new books. In the early days of publishing, it reminds us, most of the books issued were supposed to appeal to any person capable of reading. Nowadays most of the eight or nine thousands annual new books are of little or no interest except to small specialized sections of the public. This process of splitting up is going on throughout the entire field of knowledge, so that many thousands of new books are addressed not to an imaginary "general reader" but to individual groups with distinctive requirements. Even in fiction this tendency may be noted, for we have now definite classes of novels: historical, regional, proletarian, detective stories, and so on. Therefore, we should not be alarmed by the "endless flow of books" but welcome it as a sign of development of human interests and of the vitality of the publishing trade.

Mr. Hugh Eayrs, president of Macmillan's in Canada, says the glut of books is making publishing unprofitable for both publisher and author. The public is spending more money on books than ever before, but it is split up over so many titles that none gets a show, except a few best-sellers.

The circulation of the average book is lower than ever before. Book publishing, says Mr. Eayrs, sticks to old methods. The only innovations are paper-bound books and the book clubs with large numbers of subscribers and thereby guaranteed large sales. No new book can be published at low prices without guarantee of a huge run. When Doubleday-Doran put out new books at \$1, only one paid its way--a novel by H. G. Wells, that would have also gone well at \$2 or \$2.50. Mr. Eayrs indicates the need for birth control for books, and suggests that authors might have to co-operate in cheaper books by taking less royalties, and by bearing part of the risk, as by taking no royalties on the first part of the edition. George Bernard Shaw and J. M. Keynes are examples of authors who do their own publishing.

While the public libraries throughout the country satisfy a real desire of knowledge on the part of the public, not more than one-fifth of one per cent of the American population buy books regularly and thus bring them into the home. Quite obviously, therefore, the publisher's interest in spreading the habit is not wholly missionary zeal.

But he would fail in his large purpose if he did not press in this direction with all the will and resource at his command. He is bound to believe that book reading is on the whole more important and more rewarding than any other kind of reading or entertainment. And he is convinced from his experience that the ideas in books form the advance guard of the thought of to-day. As evidence of this he can point constantly to books, known to only a relatively small section of the public, which are metamorphosed into plays, movies, and radio dramatizations. Often a book author's name becomes a household word and even titles become household phrases. "Main Street" and "Gone With The Wind" evoke an immediate response from any literate American.

The distribution system through book stores is based upon the number of book buyers. Lower published prices are often urged as a solution, but numerous experiments have shown that in consequence of reductions, sales are not sufficiently increased to give the publisher a profit. More advertising would certainly help. However, the amount already spent in proportion to volume is

very high as compared to other business enterprises, and sales usually do not follow in sufficient quantities to make a substantial increase in advertising practicable. After some study of the mechanics of publishing, the person who readily finds fault with the contemporary publisher will put aside many of the easy and highly impracticable solutions that he has to offer to the problems of buying manuscripts and distributing books.

However, there are certain ills that contemporary book-publishing suffers from, besides those financial ones that the publisher himself points out. And these ills not only affect publishing but the public's reading fare, criticism, royalties to authors and other phases. These will be taken up in the next two chapters.

AMERICAN CRITICISM

There is a strong feeling that current American criticism has certain prejudices. For instance, some publishers feel that, on the whole, the body of American literary critics are Leftists and their writings favour that point of view. The Consumers' Research Association in their monthly analysis of the publishing trade have referred frequently to such a tendency. The most recent evidence the association quotes in the wholesale-panning of Sinclair Lewis's "The Prodigal Parents". This new novel takes a lusty sock at dilettante radicalism and professional Communism, but does it with chuckling good humour. A great many homespun citizens of honest character and good, vigorous, native mentality will probably find themselves closely related to the long-suffering, radical-bated, slightly pathetic but fundamentally sound leading character of the story--Fred Cornplow. Whether the association's complaint is sound is difficult to say. They are true, however, in pointing out that almost all major American critics, with the exception of William Soskin of the New York Herald-Tribune found fault with "The Prodigal Parents"

There has been a Leftist background in American criticism since 1930. It came first in radical magazines like Nation, New Republic, New Masses, Modern Monthly, etc. There was some emphasis on literary structure here but the Marxian dialect was the dominating theme. Still no one had the courage to be frankly Communistic and, furthermore, the Communist party would probably have distrusted them as intellectuals. Traces of the Marxian interpretation have lingered well into 1936-7, as shown in the collection of critical essays "After the Genteel Tradition".

Paradoxical as it may seem, present day literary criticism is tied up closely with business. Newspapers operate by their advertising contracts and publishers advertise new books weekly. No business manager will allow the publication of a regular customer, who buys a full-page in the weekly book-supplement or a stick of type on the daily book-page, to be consistently knocked. Hugh Eays, of Macmillan's in Canada, also points out that critics' business connections even include their being honorary members of certain publishing companies' editorial staffs. Favourable recommendations of new books then becomes a matter of

course. Not only is true criticism tainted but there is a secondary blight in the best-seller problem, which we shall treat later. These vast sales never go to books which can whole heartedly be acclaimed as literature. Many of us could compile a long list of writers whose work is in every way superior to that of the best-selling hierarchs, and who yet cannot earn enough to keep body and soul comfortably to-gether.

It seems strange that time and again the front page of the two leading book supplements of New York papers (Times and Tribune) feature the same new book. It seems doubly strange when the same thing is repeated in Chicago or Philadelphia or San Francisco, or some other major cities.

Despite the deficiencies mentioned above, there is a frequent brand of loyalty and faithfulness to the American reading public demonstrated in contemporary criticism. Roark Bradford, a leading New Orleans book-critic and author of the book that was later dramatized as "Green Pastures", writes that with the easing of economic situation critics are taking off the coloured glasses. For a time, unless a book was deliberately written in

a left-wing vein, the reviewers either found hidden some socialistic or communistic implications, or some "capitalistic" viewpoint of which the author was not conscious. This so-called "liberal" trend was anything but liberal in the accepted meaning of the term; rather, "liberal" in the political sense. So once again reviewers are coining new phrases to describe the old Cinderella story that appears over and over again, generally with the reverse of "living happily ever after". Mr. Bradford noted what he considers the ultimate man-killing phrase, recently, in a New York Herald-Tribune Books review of a current book. The book itself was of the school of "romantic realism", where everybody spoke in uncouth monosyllables, and had complexes and inhibitions and suffered defeatism twenty-four hours of the day. Up until this particular review, the most inane description of a man's work that the reviewers had considered to be praise was that the author has "The Awareness" of the life he described. This one, however, observed that the author was "aware of the aliveness" of his characters!

A literary situation which inspires the creat-

ion of a phrase like "aware of the aliveness", I believe, needs no further comment.

Again, how similar would reviews in Harper's magazine and the Forum be? In a recent issue of Harper's I noted that "Christ was the first communist", whereas, in Forum, the opinion is voiced that "the militant Christ was guiding Mussolini". Critics, on magazines or papers, are writing to please either the editorial or advertising hierarchs more often than they are to be honest, if, by chance displeasing.

Certain critics, however, have been very kind to me by helpful correspondence--Harry Hansen, Malcolm Cowley, Francis Brown, Carl Van Doren, et al., and their letters certainly have held little bias and much enlightenment. They have agreed in the main with my thesis that most of the American literary output, in one way or another, has reflected the mood, the sentiments of the recent period of crisis. In their own work they have found that a lot of it is subtle enough so that one has to dig deep to find the connection. Some defies such exploration. A critic, in a sense, must pick and choose; in the end his selections may be impressive enough to warrant the definite conclusions

about literary trends.

Let us not be baffled by the differences of reviewers. For instance, with regards to Ernest Hemingway's "To Have and Have Not", one critic finds it "technically a joy", and another says it is "structurally awkward and incompetent". How can this be? Well, they could both be right, but speaking of different aspects of the job. There are pages of technically good work, graphic, hard-hitting prose; but the main structure is ramshackle, not to say non-existent. It is like a series of lean-to's added to a one-room design--that is, a dragged out short story. There is also some extra-rough stuff thrown in to distract attention from the lack of genuine material. This is tiresome as well as offensive.

The average reader does not need to know technique in order to perceive its absence. It does not take a mechanic to realize that a car will not run; nor an architect to notice that a house is not standing up--although the car might have pretty varnish or the house a nice window. What the average reader who altruistically seeks guidance from reviews would prefer is comprehensive enlightenment

on the quality and general run, as to narrative, of a book. If a novel, is it a good tale well told? It is a matter of supreme indifference to him whether or not Hemingway's or any other author's "strong points" be or be not "dependent upon any sort of inner intellectual coordination" or if his "strong points" are those of "an extraverted novelist who has skill, but not substance; ingenuity, but not intensity; the use of words, but not the language of prophecy". Why should reviewers seek to chivy the reader into fretting over the author's "inner literary coordination" or the possible lack in his product of "a really searching paragraph on the literary temperament" or kindred doubts, posed by the reviewer as to whether the writer is giving his audience, what the reader thinks he should, beyond what they seek and want? Cui bono? "The play's the thing" Eke the novel, the tale, its substance, the manner of its telling.

Certainly American critics such as Clifton Fadiman of the New Yorker, Malcolm Cowley of the New Republic, Charles Poore, Percy Hutchinson, and Francis Brown of the New York Times, Lewis Gannett and Alfred Kazin of the New York Herald-Tribune,

and some others, cannot be accused of these academics in criticism. Such reviews bring to mind the famous controversy, laboured by the whisky experts over the barrel of Bourbon. Both agreed that the potion was prime. Nevertheless they wrangled. One protested that he detected a marked tang of iron in the whisky. The other roared at the outrage imposed upon his palate by a flavour of leather. They had the barrel emptied. With the final flow from the bung out rolled a carpet tack, with a leather washer.

At the time of writing this I notice an admirable new book of American criticism by Edmund Wilson--ten essays on literature entitled, "The Triple Thinkers". The New York Times review says "Mr. Wilson easily is our best critic at present". It goes on to say that the distinction of Edmund Wilson's criticism, unusual enough in this age of confusion, has been to keep his eye, separately and collectively on both objects, the objects being literature and life. He has seen them romantically and emotionally mixed together; he has analytically separated them, and he has again reconciled them, to the best of his intelligence, reasonably and usefully.

The essays are on Pushkin and Paul Elmer More,

Housman, Flaubert, Henry James, John Jay Chapman, Samuel Butler, and Shaw; and there is an essay on the decay of verse, and one on Marxism and Literature.

In two set papers Mr. Wilson makes more clear his own separation and reconciliation of life and literature. In an article on poetry, which seems to echo Max Eastman's "The Literary Mind in an Age of Science", he seems to believe that poetry will turn into prose, or a mixed kind of prose, and in his last or latest article on Marxism and Literature he apparently states that this mixed poetry and prose will have a socialistic imaginative power (as in Malvaux, for instance) comparable with Dante's religious vision. On the one hand there is a clear disconnection from propaganda literature (from the original Soviet idea of literary dictatorship), on the other an (almost unwilling) disconnection from pure aestheticism; and in between there is this ideal which Mr. Wilson stands for, whatever his particular criticism may be, of literature, of ideas, in Flaubert, Shaw, James, or Pushkin, freely and seriously discussible. Mediating between ideas for the future and the literature of the past, Mr. Wilson easily is one of the best critics of the present.

THE PROFESSOR'S VIEWPOINT

Many American university professors were called upon in the preparation of material for this thesis. Their replies frequently failed to give any enlightening explanations of the more recent developments in the literature of the country; but they did make definite comment, in most cases, upon the trends that have crystallized somewhat since the onset of the depression. On the whole they seemed to be satisfied with the progress that the literature seemed to be making. It was generally conceded that the depression did serve ~~as~~ a purging purpose in restoring to American thought and writing some of the sanity it had lost during the twenties.

But American college and university professors have no good word to say for frankly left literature. They cannot see any place for it in the great river of national culture that has flowed from colonial sources and in frontier streams. Professor Jay B. Hubbell of Duke University, as a typical spokesman for many others, was emphatic on this point. But on the other hand, the country's great teachers welcome the experimentation that has come since 1929. Professor John S. Davenport of the University

of Tennessee believes it to be a sign that Americans are genuinely interested in seeing life clearly and picturing it wholly as never before. There is no cheap flag-waving smuggerly now, and the writing mediums are selected and changed or adapted freely to meet the needs of the troubled thinker.

Experimentation eventually will bring to American literature both philosophical and literary virtues, believes Professor Lawrence E. Watkin of Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia. Dr. Watkin cannot see any progress being made with the type of novel that propounds the philosophy of the naturalists and realists and makes heroes out of weak members of the lower-classes. Psychological study of that group will place literature in a stereotyped routine from which it cannot ever hope to escape. Pioneer stories, on the other hand, fit in with the traditional thought of the country and, at the same time, point the way to new ideals that will benefit the literature.

Perhaps the writers will retort, "You are University professors. What do you know about what we should write? You teach literature that has come down from away back". That's just the

point I would like to make here. The university men are dealing primarily and largely with what has endured from all periods and all countries. What advice they have to give is well founded upon standards that have measured the creative work of past masters. The university professor is not unconscious of the writer's problem, although the modern author may feel he is traditionally bound to resent professorial opinion. As Professor Harlan of the University of Akron recognizes, "the man of letters is commonly one of very real social sympathies, though he may be quite unfitted to deal with the intellectual problem of the social sciences". Out of the dilemma of the depression, few writers have given anything that is both literature and well grounded social protest. And yet many instructors do not feel the combination is hopeless.

Nor are the professors blind to the demands of the reading public itself. Professor Ernest E. Leisy of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, notes in a Southwest Review article the declining interest in reminders of a depressed social order, and an increasing desire to find escapes in farm stories and novels of the past.

The nation itself wants to read of times and places when and where comprehensible patterns of life can still be discovered.

American universities have made definite curricular reflections of the depression. I quote a few cases here from letters that were received. Mr. W. S. Campbell is instructor in creative writing courses at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. His work in short story writing has been definitely revised both in story subject and treatment, as a result of social changes. Professor Walter R. Whitney at the University of Maine teaches similar courses. He too welcomes the recent experimentations with short story form, believing they have saved it from the devitalizing effects of fixation and sterility. At Syracuse University, the modern literature courses have been revamped to reflect the changes I have been mentioning. The University of Toronto's courses in American literature are also including the social writers, both in prose and poetry, as well as the general trends of the last few years. Professor Robert W. Bolwell at George Washington University, Washington, D.C., conducts his discussions on American literature under these labels:

(1) Proletarian literature as an outgrowth of social protest and criticism of the muck-raking era; (2) Naturalism and Determinism growing out of defeated Individualism; (3) Humanism as a cure for Naturalism, Determinism and Defeatism. The group of English professors at Swarthmore College, all of whom I have quoted somewhere previously, are definite in pointing out that a new type of Humanism is America's literary solution. This places the future route somewhere between escape and realism.

Professor Glenwood Clark at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia, finds the devitalizing cynicism of the twenties fortunately gone from American literature. Perhaps all the trends had a hand in this--proletarianism, regionalism, historicalism, etc. Anyway he welcomes the efforts to awaken and focus a general social conscience with or without suggesting remedies for America's social, economic, and political evils. He also finds a comforting quality, from purely literary considerations, in the return of the Victorian novel in bulk and general technique. Dean Virgil L. Jones of the University of Kansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, welcomes two other new influences in the story, ^{of} ~~and~~

Chekov and Katherine Mansfield, and the use of poetry in the drama, such as Maxwell Anderson has made. But Dean Jones finds the work of men like Robinson Jeffers anti-humanistic.

I suggest that American writers who seek advice for finding a place among their great literary predecessors listen to their college professors. They are the ones who can tell them what they should hope for; not so much because college professors have any particular opensesame to artistic success, but because they will simply ask them to measure their work in the light of the past and in the light of Humanism.

THE PROBLEM OF BEST SELLERS

The vogue of best-sellers, in its more dangerous aspects, is a menace to the well-being of the profession of letters. It has grown with the increase of competition in the publishing trade. Essentially it is a by-product of the "plug-system" of criticism which was referred to in a previous chapter. This system is the result of: (1) tabloid reviews on the radio; (2) "arranged" reviews between a publishing house's advertising department, or between a critic and an editorial staff; (3) book-clubs; (4) personality write-ups of popular authors; (5) literary prizes. Any one of these is a sure-fire method to stimulate interest and when they all are employed the literature of the nation is almost completely a controlled affair.

Of the book clubs operating in the nation, two are definitely influencing the course of American literature. These are the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Literary Guild. There are a number of lesser clubs, many sponsored by department stores, but the two mentioned, especially the former, handle the big bulk of the club sales. Their boards of

critics "pick", from selected manuscripts of forthcoming publications, a new book every four weeks. This is the recommended selection in a monthly news letter to every subscriber. But the subscriber must indicate that he does not want the book. Otherwise it will be sent to him. In other words, for the saving in book purchasing costs that members enjoy, they are subtly legislated into buying recommended reading. The Book-of-the-Month Club established the system about thirteen years ago, the Literary Guild a little over ten, but both clubs have been increasing ever since. Selection by either club now means the greatest single advertisement and financial boost a publishing house can gain for its publication. Rarely does the board of editors pass out a book of inferior quality and the quarterly book extras or dividends are well worth your membership. But it is hard to believe that there is not some connection between the major publishing houses and the directors of the book clubs.

The arranged reviews have been discussed in the previous chapter. Too often critical columns are glorified advertising copy, masking under the guise of literary news. Tabloid reviews that mention

but two or three "four star" books and make no attempt at criticism are hardly commendable.

People are eternally interested in people and so publishers realizing this have encouraged publicity about authors, as a means of book-sales stimulation. Now, it is much more convenient to have the publicity concern a few writers than many and so the best-sellers scheme ties in favourably and works mutually with the news concerning the authors. Daily life stories about Margaret Mitchell, Hervey Allen, Kenneth Roberts, Sinclair Lewis, etc., will keep us all on the qui vive, or so the advertisers hope, for their next books.

Fortunately, no publishing house has such a low regard for its products that it will send money out to buy public attention to an obviously mediocre book. Nor will any critic sign a review that praises a volume completely lacking in merit. Still the best-seller system, as practiced at present, does affect seriously the development of American literature. It does serve a purpose in bringing to the public a consciousness of their current literature, and for that reason the system

is partly commendable. But the abuses are frequently too flagrant, and both the author and the reader suffer.

The amount of money spent on new books does not vary much from one year to another. If, therefore, one author collars an excessive amount of it, other authors will go short. The reader suffers when he buys a book praised as a leader and enjoying vast sales that is very mediocre. Most of them will never go down as great literature. On the other hand, deserving authors are often neglected because their publishing house happens to be a small one with only a slight advertising appropriation.

It has been suggested that the problem might be reduced by a statutory limitation. Let a writer draw his royalties (with a maximum rate fixed) on sales up to, say, 15,000. If he sells more than that let him have the kudos of his popularity, but let his royalties after 15,000 copies go into a common fund to be divided among the less fortunate. Similarly, all publishers of authors dead and unable to claim royalties should be compelled to pay ten per cent of their gross income from such reprints into the common fund. The publishers

would doubtless howl, but I rather imagine I hear ghostly applause from the shades of Shakespeare, Johnson, Keats, Wordsworth, and the rest.

By and large, the adoption of such a scheme would bring us nearer to equity. Of course, the administration of the common fund might slip into a racket. In the first place, there would be the question of the appointment of the committee responsible for its allocation. How, and by whom, should it be chosen? Should it represent publishers, or book-sellers, or authors, or all three combined? Should critics or university professors have any say? Should a place be found on it for some one to watch out on behalf of the general reading public?

Imagination boggles, too, at the prospect of the countless host of "less fortunate" authors that would besiege the doors of the committee in the hope of picking up the crumbs that fell from the tables of the more prosperous. The W. P. A. committees handling the national art and literary projects perhaps would be able to give us some data on that phase of the problem. Moreover, so revolutionary an amendment of the American copy-right system would

require fresh legislation, and it is hardly credible that Congress would ever consent to a change that would be resisted by so many influential existing interests.

In a thesis such as this, in which trends are traced, the problem of best-sellers is a confusing one. It becomes difficult to determine the real depth of influence of the current literature. It makes literary evaluation difficult as well. But we hope that the survey as presented here will be of some originality and worth, despite the stage effects that we found too frequently cluttering up the actual scene.

SUMMARY

Here are gathered in summary form most of the main developments analyzed in this work. It also includes some mention of a few points that could not be conveniently treated in previous chapters.

1. A country's literature should not be ignored until it becomes tradition. It deserves serious study at the time of its appearance from the very fact that it is related to and grows out of the problems and attitudes in the national life. That is the proposed justification of this thesis. To enforce my arguments and conclusions I made a canvass of professional, critical and publishing trade opinion. In general I found that American writers are working with a new interest in the future of American culture. They are consciously aiming at development with new social ideals but their interest is deeply rooted in America of the past. I believe it means that American literature is taking a positive attitude towards life.

The occurrence of the depression makes the years under survey of particular interest for a study of this type. Furthermore, American literature has always reflected fairly well the conditions

contemporary with its appearance.

2. The American nation is made up of many different nationalities. Such a heterogeneous population is bound to have some effects on the country's culture. The question is whether or not the effects will be to the good of the country as a whole, after the first disturbing elements have worn away. We must also remember that America grew rapidly and is still, comparatively speaking, a young country. It has only now begun to outgrow the frontier buoyancy and optimistic outlook. Three R's are peculiar to American literature because of its heritage and population: Realism, Rugged individualism and Regionalism. Some may say: that it is a pity such a country can never hope to have a truly uniform, national literature; that writers will never be able to rise above problems and practical associations to a rich humanism; that American literature will never be able to acquire a universality and a place with the great works of the world. I believe that the future of American humanism will be derived from its basic and traditional optimism and the complexities of its cultures.

3. Letters from professors and critics, as well

as the material I gathered myself, have convinced me that, with certain exceptions, the depression has been on the whole a beneficial purging of American literature. It brought a return to sanity after the literary gyrations following the post-war years.

4. Proletarian literature has singularly failed. It has not achieved any of the significance that belongs to the great proletarian literature of the world. The trouble with American writers has been that they have been writing from "a top level of consciousness". The result has been propaganda very largely. Of course, there has been the odd man who has written of the hard times with something more than realistic preaching; but he has been the exception.

5. Escape literature was a natural reaction to both the economic problems and proletarian literature. Americans, as well as other people, have been seeking escapes for ages, but the varieties of escape literature during the last five years have been fairly definite--historical fiction, regionalism, inspirational literature, etc. People are rediscovering the importance of past epochs, as well, when other generations were faced with problems. This trend has brought a new light upon

historical fiction generally and a particular interest in the Civil War period, for that was America's previous major crisis. Regional stories have ranged from Maine to California but the favour has been given to the South. Inspirational, or boot-strap, "literature" may rank among the best-sellers but hardly any place else.

6. American humanists claim that the contemporary literature of their country is devoid of humanism. I do not believe this is so, nor do I believe the future to be a hopeless one. Naturalism, Determinism, and Defeatism have been rampant since the Great War but Humanism will win out eventually. Many gains are already being made.

7. Short stories were among the first branches of literature to reflect the changes brought about by the depression. However, they revised the fiction procedure of proletarianism and then escape. The short stories began with escape yarns and better times had to arrive before hard-luck stories were printed. Short-story treatment has changed considerably too. No essayist of first rank has appeared since 1929.

8. Poetry has not fared so well as the drama. Sociological interest has found a large place in

both but has been least successful in poetry. Jeffers, Millay, and MacLeish are among the leaders in this trend, but it is doubtful if their poetry will serve any moment but the present one, and, perhaps, not that too well. However, there has been a healthy and interesting poetic activity since the depression. The drama is a matter of greater concern to New Yorkers than any other citizens in the United States. Maxwell Anderson, Clifford Odets, and Sidney Kingsley are especially important members of the period under analysis.

9. Biography and autobiography have been particularly popular. The depression has encouraged a tendency to reveal self as armour against the encroachments of a standardized civilization. Treatment has changed considerably.

10. Publishers have suffered financially from the depression but on the whole have made more practical sacrifices than literary ones. Abuses of their associations with newspaper critics and book clubs and commercial literary awards have resulted in conditions that should be condemned.

11. American criticism, too, has become tainted by competitive book-marketing.

12. The best-seller system paradoxically is to be commended and condemned. It does create and sustain interest in literature but it too often promotes inferior books to ever place them among the great body of world literature.

13. American university professors have recognized all the major trends in the country's literature. Some they have praised, others belittled. Their general insistence is that a greater degree of Humanism must be attained before the work will be really great.

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Below is given a list of the university professors who responded with material to my questionnaire letter on this thesis. Their replies are on file.

Beede, Margaret
University of North Dakota.

Bolwell, Robert W.
George Washington University.

Brown, Leonard
Syracuse University.

Campbell, W. S.
University of Oklahoma.

Clark, H. H.
University of Wisconsin.

Clark, G. Glenwood
College of William and Mary.

Davenport, John S.
University of Tennessee.

Eby, Harold
University of Washington.

Halline, Allan J.
Bucknell University.

Hamilton, Harlan W.
University of Akron.

Hart, J. D.
University of California.

Hicks, Philip
Swarthmore College.

Hubbell, Jay B.
Duke University.

Huggard, William
Depauw University.

Hunt, Everett L.
Swarthmore College.

Joint Letters from English Department
University of Maine.

Jones, Dean Virgil L.
University of Arkansas.

Klees, Frederick
Swarthmore College.

Leisy, Ernest E.
Southern Methodist University.

Nelson, J. H.
University of Kansas.

Spiller, Robert E.
Swarthmore College.

Secretary, Department of English
New York University.

Tamblyn, W. F.
University of Western Ontario.

Wagenknecht, Edward
University of Washington.

Warren, Louis
University of Southern California.

Watkin, Lawrence E.
Washington and Lee University.

Whipple, T. K.
University of California.

Whitney, Walter R.
University of Maine

Winslow, Anne
University of Wyoming.

Winther, Sophus K.
University of Washington.

Wolle, Francis
University of Colorado.

Scores of others sent book and periodical references that were equally as valued as actual correspondence. Two series of radio talks by Professors E. K. Brown and J. F. MacDonald of the University of Toronto also were helpful.

2. Material from the following critics was used. Any letters are on file.

Adams, J. Donald
Editor, New York Times Book
Reviews Magazine.

Bradford, Roark
New Orleans.

Brown, Francis
New York Times

Brown, Heywood
New York Sun.

Canby, Henry Seidel
Book-of-the-Month Club.

Cowley, Malcolm
New Republic.

Deacon, William A.
Toronto Globe and Mail.

Doren, Carl Van
New York.

Duffus, R. L.
New York Times.

Fadiman, Clifton
New Yorker Magazine.

Gannett, Lewis
New York Herald-Tribune.

Hansen, Harry
New York World-Telegram.

Hutchinson, Percy
New York Times.

Kazin, Alfred
New York Herald-Tribune.

MacFarlane, Leslie
Toronto.

Poore, Charles
New York Times.

Sandwell, B. K.
Toronto Saturday Night.

Soskin, Illiam
New York Herald-Tribune.

Time Magazine Critic
New York.

Walton, Edith H.
New York Times.

Weeks, Edwin A.
Atlantic Monthly.

3. Letters from various publishing houses
were written by:

Canfield, Cass
Harper and Brothers, New York.

Harman, E.
Oxford University Press, Toronto.

Hitchcock, Curtice N.
Reynal and Hitchcock, New York.

Howe, Quincy
Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York.

Jenkins, Herbert F.
Little, Brown and Co., Boston.

Norton, W. W.
W. W. Norton and Co., New York.

Pierce, Dr. Lorne
Ryerson Press, Toronto.

Smith, Bernard
Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York.

Wheelock, John Hall
Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHYGeneral

"The World Almanac" prints each year lists of Pulitzer and Nobel Prize Awards.

Authors To-day and Yesterday

Living Authors

Baker's "Guide to the Best Fiction".

Book Review Digest.

The Standard Catalogue for Private Libraries.

The United States Catalogue.

Dictionary of American Biography.

Essay and General Literature Index.

Mudge's "A Guide to Reference Books".

Who's Who in America.

The American Year Books--1933-1937.

REFERENCES ON LITERARY CRITICISM

- Annual Collections of Burns Mantle (Dodd, Mead)
- William Rose Benet (Dodd, Mead)
Fifty Poets.
- Best Short Stories (Houghton, Mifflin)
Edited by Edward J. O'Brien.
- Percy Boynton (University of Chicago Press)
Some Contemporary Americans.
- Henry S. Canby (Holt)
Study of the Short Story.
- Henry Seidel Canby (Harcourt, Brace)
American Estimates.
Definitions, First and Second Lines.
- Barrett H. Clark
Story of Modern Drama.
- H. H. Clark
Pandora's Box of Literature.
- Criticism in America, Its Function and Status
A Symposium (Harcourt, Brace)
- Malcolm Cowley
After the Genteel Tradition.
Exile's Return.
The Writer in a Changing World.
- Elizabeth Drew (Norton)
Discovering Poetry.
- Max Eastman (Scribner's)
The Literary Mind.
- Norman Foerster (Farrar and Rinehart)
Towards Standards: A Study of the Present
Critical Movement in American Letters.
- E. M. Forster
Aspects of the Novel.
- Harry Hartwick
Foreground of American Fiction.

- Ludwig Lewisohn
Expression in America.
- John Livingston Lowe (Houghton, Mifflin)
Convention and Revolt in Poetry.
- H. E. Lubbock
Contemporary American Literature and Religion.
- Percy Lubbock (Scribner's)
The Craft of Fiction
- Pulitzer Prize Plays (Random House)
- Stuart P. Sherman (Scribner's)
Main Streams.
On Contemporary Literature.
- J. H. A. Sparrow (Yale University Press)
Sense and Poetry: Essays on the Plan of
Meaning in Contemporary Verse.
- Story Anthology (Vanguard)
- Frank Swinnerton
University of Books.
- Lucia Trent and Edward Ralph Cheney (Harrison)
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- Louis Untermeyer
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(Duke University)

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Staurday Review of Literature

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