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Everybody is Reading THE OUTLINE OF SCIENCE Are You?

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FICTION THAT ENTERTAINS AND THAT IRRITATES



Sinclair Lewis, Master of Stenographic Realism

IF CHESTERTON had had Sinclair Lewis in mind he could not have characterized him more aptly than he has done in producing for our impressions of America. Chesterton writes: "I suppose that most of the very best impressions have come from the careful recording of very true facts. They have come from the fatal power of observing the facts without being able to observe the truth. It is impossible to put one's finger on any incident in Lewis' new novel, 'Babbitt' (Harcourt Brace & Co.) and say 'This is false,' but the book as a whole is as true as a burlesque sketch of a team of vaudeville actors. Lewis has been called a realist. In the sense that he has attempted to write the history of a year in the life of George F. Babbitt, real estate operator of Zenith, a city of 300,000 population, he is a realist. It used to be said that the novelists who began the revolt against romanticism would cut a chunk out of life anywhere and describe it without plot or purpose other than to leave a man livid for a month. Their novels started nowhere and ended nowhere. 'Babbitt' is like this. It is stenographic realism. Lewis seems to be lacking in selective judgment. He reports the inconsequent conversations of his characters as if he had stood beside them with his sharpened pencil and pad and had taken down everything which he could overhear. It does not seem to matter whether it is important or not. He has even gone so far as to fill several pages with a speech which his hero made to a gathering of business men. It is excellent burlesque of the kind of speeches which 'silver wires' are in the habit of making, but as literary art it would have contented himself with a page of it at most. Lewis, however, seems to have been so proud of his facility at this kind of writing that he did not know when to stop. The most literary artists have not erred in this way, for they have wrought with conscious and deliberate restraint, producing their effects by the omission of all irrelevant matter. AND the great literary artists have also exercised a creative imagination. They justify the remark which I quoted from Burroughs last week that literature is the result of the vital, imaginative reaction of a man to a subject. Lewis has a theme in this careful novel. It is the problem of the individual man. It is hinted in the closing pages when Babbitt tells his son, who has made a runaway marriage with the girl he loved, that he is glad the boy knows what he wanted and had the courage to make it, but, he says, 'I've never done a single thing I've wanted to do in my whole life.' Hergesheimer handled a similar theme in 'Cathedral,' and he handled it with a creative imagination. He made a story with a plot and a climax. To use the words of Burroughs, he came into vital imaginative relation with his subject. Lewis seems to be so intent on recording literally the banal and stray conversation of contemporary business men and the youth of the period that he is unable to get very far beneath the skin of his characters. Yet this superficial realism of his is

doubtless responsible for the great popularity of 'Main Street' and for the growing popularity of 'Babbitt.' It is so real that at times it is startling. No man without a considerable literary gift could have done it. I have said that he lacks restraint, but to his credit it must be said that he has described two dinner parties with much greater literary skill than was shown by Booth Tarkington in 'Alice Adams.' The purpose of the Tarkington dinner party was to exhibit the difference in social habits of the Adams family and of the family of the young man present as a guest. Tarkington piles mishap upon mishap until it becomes painful, whereas he could have produced his effect more gracefully by omitting half of them and by allowing something pleasant to happen to relieve the gloom. This is the opinion of a mere man. Women have said that the dinner party of Tarkington is one of the finest things in the book. Lewis, however, has Babbitt's dinner party, a family meeting in higher social circles than he and with a few deft strokes he produces the impression which he is after, the patronizing mood of the guests and the feeling of the hosts that they are being patronized. Then he has the Babbitts entertained at dinner by a family in a lower social circle than theirs and reports the air of patronizing with the Babbitts doing the patronizing. But neither dinner party leads anywhere. The people are just there where they were before. Tarkington's dinner party is a crisis in his novel, but in for a purpose and the effect is accomplished.

Lewis may in time become as skillful as Tarkington, in other ways, but he will have to change his methods first.

PROFESSOR STEWART P. SHERMAN, one of the admirers of Lewis, has admirably summarized the man's present limitations in a recent essay in which he says that if he "does not wish to pass for a hardened pessimist he will have to produce a hero qualified in some fashion to register his own quest for the desirable. Neither in 'Main Street' nor in 'Babbitt' has he indicated that there is anything that is to be desired. A Freudian might say that he is a man who has vainly sought for enduring satisfactions, and has decided that they are not to be found. But the dissatisfaction which Lewis describes is not the divine discontent of which the poets have written. It is the disgust of little people with the necessity of earning a living when they would much rather be doing something else. It is impossible for either a man or a woman to escape from the struggle for existence. The man must earn the money to buy food and clothing for his family and the woman must superintend the cooking of the food, she does not do it herself and she must look after the children. These are the simple duties of life which when recognized are done without chafing under the yoke. Stevenson's butcher, who carved meat, but in his meditative life dwelt with the saints, had solved his problem. Lewis' people carve meat and superintend the cooking of the food, the goodly furies. They may be typical Americans, but I do not want to think that they are.

GEORGE W. DOUGLAS.

Brief Notes of Worth-While Books

"THREE BLACK BAGS" (Century Company) while it has all the individuality that marked Marion Post-War Mystery Yearn's "The Mystery of the Mystery," it lacks the intense imagination of E. Phillips Oppenheim. It is based on the discovery of the Hohenzollern throne, by a concerted uprising in the occupied Rhineland through the agency of various of the various allied forces gathering in the region. An American of fortune, after his exploits at the front, becomes almost instinctively involved in the mystery of the Hohenzollern throne. The story of a black bag, which is a coded ring for one owned by a German secret agent, and which contains valuable information, is the key to the puzzle. Miss Angellotti has a charming American girl—a veritable blonde—whose name is with the title of the novel. This is the account of love-romance novel of the present time. It is a story of love and courage, and everything is arranged to the big denouement, which is the triumph of the heroine. Miss Angellotti has done very well in the ground covered in this novel. She has been a writer for both the A. E. F. and the A. O. This knowledge of the battle and the temperament of the people are her remarkable assets.

ADRIAN VICTORIANUS will give us a "The Great Play" of the present time. It is a story of love and courage, and everything is arranged to the big denouement, which is the triumph of the heroine. Miss Angellotti has done very well in the ground covered in this novel. She has been a writer for both the A. E. F. and the A. O. This knowledge of the battle and the temperament of the people are her remarkable assets.

High Life in a Cream Puff "I Love—and Danna" (Thomas Y. Crowell) is a story of love and courage, and everything is arranged to the big denouement, which is the triumph of the heroine. Miss Angellotti has done very well in the ground covered in this novel. She has been a writer for both the A. E. F. and the A. O. This knowledge of the battle and the temperament of the people are her remarkable assets.

THE FUN OF BEING A FAT MAN By William Johnston

THE CHARM OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM By James Reid Marsh

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SOME REAL POETRY

Hilda Conkling, Twelve Years Old, Has an Unusual Gift of Expression

Every child is a poet, but few children have the gift of expression. Hilda Conkling, however, who published a volume of verse, "Poems by a Little Girl" (Frederick A. Stokes Company), a volume containing about 150 pieces of verse each of which records a poetic mood.

She is only about twelve years old, so we cannot be expected to have great facility with rhyme and meter. She has used the free verse form that puts no barrier between her thought and its expression. If she were older and more sophisticated she might be classed among the Imagists and Symbolists, but as her poems are the spontaneous outburst of her imagination, it would be unjust to classify her as anything but an unusually gifted child writing down what is in her. Yet Amy Lowell or H. D. might have written "Lullies," which runs in this way:

For the lullies come out
The air flows to flow about them
Flows and flows and wanders
Lullies the wind has a sadness
Lullies the wind is a little
Lullies the wind is a little
Lullies the wind is a little

Her imagery is that of a fresh mind looking at the world. She says of the stars that "their twinkling is like the twittering of many birds in the early morning." She says of the sun that "Early Morning" that "the blue sky coming opened its eyes to the sun," and explains that "this is a picture poem, but it is not a picture, too." Yet again, she writes that "a breeze will come lying with a lamp around its neck."

This is the very essence of poetry and it suggests that the great poets are but mere and women who have retained their child hearts and have not lost all memory of that land from which they came to infancy, "trailing clouds of glory." Amy Lowell has called Hilda a genius. That may be true, but those who have been in the confidence of children and have listened to their imaginings will be likely to insist that her gift consists not only in the ability to write down what passes through her mind, but in the ability to think the things which she writes. If she can retain her freshness of vision as she grows in years, she will write some verse of surpassing beauty before she is twenty.

CHALLENGES READERS

Must Be Astute to Fathom Solution of "Romance of a Million Dollars"

The reader of "The Romance of a Million Dollars" (Doubleday-Merrill), who has fashioned the solution before Elizabeth Deanna has splashed it into the closing pages of her story is again included. There are mystery stories and stories that only claim to be such. All too many exist on improbabilities.

From the first scene of "The Romance of a Million Dollars" when a dainty Marie Angoulême nearly loses her life in a strange adventure in a Pullman car until the last surprising twist of the tale, there is not a lax moment or one that causes even the astute equality of a mystery tale devotee to break.

The little French girl finds herself in a family of strange people—three cousins, one an admitted thief, another a noble for her motto, and the third a breeding, mysterious girl with a severe love affair. On the shoulders of the maid from France rests the burden of uncovering the truth of a series of robberies and incidentally of winning the man she wants.

Just when the reader has decided he has solved the problem but is wondering how he could figure it out, what he wishes to be, the answer is flashed out upon the pages. It would spoil an enjoyable evening to even hint at the solution. That wouldn't be fair.

"The Romance of a Million Dollars" is a story that will engross the interest from start to finish; in fact one of the best written of its kind in many noons.

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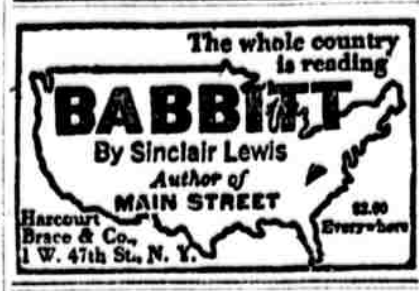
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An Anthology of Verse for Girls Dorothy Canfield Fisher writes the introduction to an anthology of poetry for girls, compiled by Mary G. Davis, published by Stokes. It is called "The Girls' Book of Verse," and is the result of years of experience with girls and their tastes in poetry. The collection includes the oldest as well as the newest poets.



THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING By Robert Keable, Author of "Simon Called Peter" The New York Times Says: "Far and away the most interesting character in the book is the vivid, passionate, intelligent, widely read, ruthless and strong-willed, but generous, fascinating Pamela, who dabbled in strange arts and ran strange risks, besides playing an ugly game from excellent motives."

ATOLLS OF THE SUN BY FREDERICK O'BRIEN The new book by the author of "White Shadows in the South Seas." Illustrated. \$5.00 THE CENTURY CO.

THE HOUSE OF MOHUN by GEORGE GIBBS The romance of a modern society girl whose futile, furious existence did not end until she had reached the end of her tether.

THE THREE FIRES by Amelia Josephine Burr Fire the destroyer, fire the purifier, and fire the warm comfort of the home are the three fires which flame up around the passionate story of Nina, a young Hindu girl of Ceylon. Swift in action, romantic in character, and exotic in setting, it is a novel of breathtaking and intense interest.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE By Edith Gittings Reid The force and fitness of Florence Nightingale's character stand paramount and are made deeply impressive. The dramatist has caught marvellously, in a few pithy scenes, the miracle nurse of the Crimea.

THE WALTZ OF THE DOGS By Leonid Andreyev In this play Andreyev shows how a strong, well-balanced, systematic man is affected by disillusionment resulting from disappointed love.

KRINDLESYKE By Wilfrid Wilson Gibson In a shepherd's hut on the wind-swept mountain is staged this drama of love, disloyalty and tragic disillusionment.

Saint Jeanne d'Arc By Minna Caroline Smith The story of Jeanne is told here with a new effectiveness and infused with new life. Her mystic visions, her patriotic service, her trials, her martyrdom are all related with fine sincerity and high enthusiasm.

Modern Italy By the Hon. Tommaso Tittoni A vivid account of Italy's contribution to modern literature and art. To international law and to economic theory. The attitude of Americans toward Italian culture is also worthy of especial note.

When Kansas Was Young By T. A. McNeal These stories of the border town of Kansas in the wild, rough days of the seventies describe vividly practical jokes and political manipulations as well as tales of some famous people.

THE MORALS OF THE MOVIE BY Dr. Ellis Paxson Oberholzer A fearless and frank discussion of the morality of the motion picture industry from the standpoint of the cinema. The moral appeal to sex and the other evil practices exposed by previous authors are thoroughly exposed.

A WORLD WORTH WHILE By W. A. Rogers With an introduction by Booth Tarkington DELIGHTFUL anecdotes—intimate reminiscences—amusing drawings—by the man who won international fame as cartoonist on the New York Herald. "It is as though one were admitted to a cozy, intimate chat with the artist, and the effect is pleasant in the extreme."—New York Sun. \$3.00 HARPER & BROTHERS Established 1817 New York

THE WIND BLOWETH By DONN BYRNE JAMES BRANCH CABELL said "Messer Marco Polo" was "a magically beautiful book." So is this new novel—and it is a bigger book. It is the record, in a passionate style of haunting melody, of the love-life of a roving Irish sea captain in many parts of the world. Illustrated by George Bellows. \$2.00.

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