

being moved even if remaining a little incredulous. The immature but brilliant Aureol is very real—and very attractive.

Only the politicians in the book are a little unconvincing. There is too much beefsteak in them. Their mind and their political morals are mediocre. No real men oppose Ambrose Sheridan and for that reason the reader is indulgent to him. He escapes condemnation. There is no one, not even Mr. Baldwin, who is a great moral force in English life. But were Ambrose Sheridan trying to thwart an Abraham Lincoln or anyone with authority of character or real genius he would at once look like a great villain.

The book ends like a sliced film, on a very problematical situation and no indication of a solution is given. I am inclined to think that Ambrose Sheridan would have saved no one, neither his girl-love, nor his mistress, nor his wife, nor society. The novel is sardonically entitled "Saviours of Society."

Huxley of the High Hand

JESTING PILATE: AN INTELLECTUAL HOLIDAY. By ALDOUS HUXLEY. New York: George H. Doran Company. 1926. \$3.50.

Reviewed by MONTGOMERY BELGION

MR. HUXLEY has been playing at Carrie Nation with the world for his oyster-bar. Those who, on the evidence of his novels and stories, have got him docketed as cynical, disgusted, disillusioned, devoid of ideals, not to mention "sophisticate" and "enervate" (the indigenes hereabouts, have you noticed? have taken to dropping their d's, perhaps to avoid damming their flow of prose), will have to change the label. They should have pondered his journalism more seriously. At any rate it is easy to discern now that "On the Margin" and "Along the Road" were harbingers of the metamorphosis that has resulted in this book. But he has gone further than those works ever led one to expect. In them, forsooth, he was often high hat; now, however, he uses the high hand. He rides over the world roughshod. He has developed a prodigious, a portentous "moral earnestness."

Those who like to harken to a good scold need not read any further; they may hasten at once to the bookstore where they will find this volume admirably printed on good paper but outrageously lacking an index.

Meanwhile, for the less urgently masochistic, I will continue. The qualities that have endeared Mr. Huxley to his far too restricted public are here in full measure. Among these qualities are:

First, a habit of saying either (a) exactly what the reader already believes or (b) exactly the opposite of what the reader believes. It doesn't matter whether it is (a) or (b): the result is equally satisfying. Whether, for instance, the reader thinks of the Taj Mahal as a wedding cake in marble or whether he (or she) considers it to be a sample of those Pearly Gates of which St. Peter is the guardian, Mr. Huxley's reflections on it will supply a quantitatively identical thrill.

Second, an air of erudition. I don't mean Mr. Huxley hasn't real erudition, but it is paraded with an air, and it is that air which is so charming. Here again it matters little whether or not the reader is familiar with the Euripidean chorus, Aristophanes's "Frogs," Racine, Callot's etchings, Scaliger and Bentley, Palladio's Rotonda at Vicenza, the *Hibbert Journal*, William of Tyre, Niccolo Pisano, the poem "Don Leon," Marco Polo, Edgar Allan Poe, Claude le Lorrain, or Dryden and "The Custom of the Country." It doesn't matter whether he imagines Callot to be a dressmaker and Bentley a maker of motor-cars. The ignorant and the learned alike will find Mr. Huxley's manner of referring to all these irresistibly captivating.

Third, a sense of humor. This is particularly Mr. Huxley's own, but once a taste for it has been acquired, it is, like a taste for hashish, insatiable. He is the only Anglo-Saxon one can think of who can make a Gallic joke with an easy Gallic abstention from grossness.

But here these qualities are merely the tiger's purr, Carrie's muff concealing the hatchet. Here Mr. Huxley reveals himself as a stern Mentor and Tele-machus, the poor world, gets it in the cervical vertebrae every time. "To travel," he says on page 241, "is to discover that everybody is wrong," and, by heck! he means it.

See America first. America began for Mr. Huxley far beyond the Pacific, at Worldpeace, a burg in Batavia. He was surprised to find the world, the western world, and peace thus so amicably juxtaposed. For the western world, in the shape of films from Hollywood, seemed to him so imbecile as to justify "the Javanese in rising and murdering every white man they met." Hollywood, he concluded in short, was further lowering the white man's already sunken prestige. America continued in Manila: nine reporters had interviewed Mr. Huxley within three hours of his arrival. It reappeared at Kyoto, Japan, "two or three hundred times as large as any possible Wild Western original" of a mining camp. He crossed the Pacific in an American ship: clickings like the telling of beads could be heard taking place behind cabin-doors—the rattle of ice, it was—and the legacy of Faraday and Clerk Maxwell he found employed to let the passengers learn on the first morning out from Yokohama that "Mrs. X, girl wife of Dr. X, aged 79, had been arrested for driving her automobile along the railroad track, whistling like a locomotive."

Yet San Francisco provided a shock: he gave the reporters his prejudices on the English general strike; in print he found his views completely reversed. From a mild laborite he had been converted into a vociferous yea-sayer for Mr. Baldwin. Then Los Angeles, the City of Dreadful Joy, the miles of films in process of manufacture, the announcements of the rival religious sects "advertising the spiritual wares that they would give away, or sell on the Sabbath;" Baptists with a Giant Marimaphone, Methodists with carnations, Congregationalists with Jackie Coogan, Advanced Thinkers with Miss Leila Castberg, Evangelists with "an old-fashioned revival;" Los Angeles with the gargantuan profusion of its restaurants, and between the succulent courses flappers and young men dancing, "clasped in an amorous wrestle;" Los Angeles with its great canticle, *Taedium laudamus!* Then Chicago's telephone directory and meditations on Mr. Veal, the undertaker trying to make himself the equal of "a physician, mathematician, academician, politician—not to mention Titian" by calling himself a mortician. Finally New York, where Mr. Huxley studied the contemporary drama, "The Cradle Snatchers" (Wycherley without the wit), "Sex" (living up to its simple name), &c.

But India catches it just as hot. The architecture of Bombay, the Mogul gardens—Shalimar and Nishat Bagh—the Kashmiris' habits, the yellow-robed holy man on the way from Peshwar to Lahore, Hindu art generally, the Thermopylean behavior of the delegates to the Cawnpore Congress, Hindu "spirituality" ("the primal curse of India"), Cawnpore medical advertisements, the Serpent which tried to swallow the sun at Benares before 1,000,000 pilgrims, "The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma"—all come in for their share of condemnation.

The result is a unique travel book. No chunks of Paterine prose lavished on sunrise in the Red Sea or seasickness off the Golden Gate, but all the time Mr. Huxley hammering in his views. To the elect I would particularly recommend the fourth entry under Delhi, the second under Labuan, the tenth under Cawnpore, the third under Calcutta, the one under Chicago, and of course the story of the elephant (second under Jaipur).

It is not that Mr. Huxley teaches one anything new. The title of the book is the fifth and sixth words of Bacon's essay, "Of Truth." The author implies that he has not stopped to find truth. But of course he had it before he started. He admits as much in conclusion when he says that the two new convictions with which he returned he had had at his departure. There is something more stimulating than this conclusion on page 170; "Fixity is appalling. It is better, it seems to me, to be destroyed, to become something unrecognizably different, than to remain forever intact and the same, in spite of altering circumstance." But, again, the late Mr. Keats had already said this, perhaps putting it even better, when he wrote in 1819: "Better be imprudent movables than prudent fixtures."

No, it is Mr. Huxley's inimitable "moral earnestness" that is novel. And to those who have watched his literary career with interest, with excitement, this "moral earnestness" may be more than prodigious, it may be indeed a portent.

A Critic of Style

THE OUTLOOK FOR AMERICAN PROSE.

By JOSEPH WARREN BEACH. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

THE author of "The Method of Henry James" and of "The Technique of Thomas Hardy" needed no recommendation to me when this volume of his collected critical essays was announced. Professor Beach was firmly established in my esteem as a critic of real ability, and when I heard that these essays were to be largely concerned with the question of style in contemporary American prose, I anticipated that combination known in the hackneyed phrase as "amusement and instruction," a combination less familiar than the phrase. I confess to having been vastly amused, but the instruction has consisted chiefly in making me wonder how the admirations expressed in this book can be reconciled with the discernment and scholarship in the two previous works.

All discussions of style have led to mighty argument and much difference of opinion. "Stylist, heal thyself" has often been the retort of those who have ventured, in a style intolerable to others, to animadvert upon the subject in general or upon the particular style of certain authors. In this respect, at least, no charge lies against Professor Beach, for he writes a clear, unaffected prose, driving home his points, and adding a leaven of humor for good measure. Nor will many dispute his contention that Joseph Hergesheimer, Theodore Dreiser, and other American writers of the first rank, actually use words ignorantly, and constantly construct sentences which defy logic and grammar. What is it, then, that takes away from this sound criticism all its critical value?

Frankly, it is the incredible lack of standards which Mr. Beach reveals through his enthusiasms. So long as he is showing the defects in a writer's syntax and pleading for educated, unaffected prose, his is unimpeachable. But when he begins by talking of the "cleverness" of a journalist who adopts the stale device of trying to disarm criticism by prefacing his book with an unfavorable review of it, one naturally wonders why he is so impatient of the certainly superior poses of some of the authors whom he denounces for their insincerity. When he sharply criticizes the "jargon" of Van Wyck Brooks, one expects to hear him praise a critic who is free from such defects, but Professor Beach leaves one speechless by hailing Mr. Paul Rosenfeld as "a critic to be reckoned with," who "writes much better than Huneker," and "has a much sharper mind."

It is possible to like Mr. Rosenfeld's criticism, if one can stand its lush, exotic, sentimentalism, but nobody would care, I think, to acquit him of those very faults, at their worst, which Mr. Beach finds unbearable in others. If ever a style betrayed misuse of English, jargon, weak grammar, and incoherence, it is the style of Mr. Rosenfeld and of Waldo Frank. Yet, Professor Beach shoves aside John Dewey, Joseph Hergesheimer, Van Wyck Brooks, and Dreiser, for being guilty of those offences, only to press the claims of John Dos Passos, Paul Rosenfeld, Sherwood Anderson, and Waldo Frank. In a discussion of these writers on the question of style, and style alone, I think it is not unreasonable to suggest that in championing the one group as against the other, the author destroys his whole case. The four whom he so very mildly reproves for their minor defects may be authors of a great deal more significance in American literature—that is another question. But when we are told "the university man is necessarily an eclectic, and what he asks of writing is that it should be first-rate," and that university man proceeds to argue that Van Wyck Brooks uses jargon, whereas Paul Rosenfeld has a "sharp mind," well, . . .

Professor Beach thinks that Thomas Hardy and George Moore handled the English language in a manner which is beyond the attainments of Joseph Hergesheimer. Yet, the abomination of Moore's style, in places, has been repeatedly discussed. Not so long ago Moore, having once pilloried Newman for writing badly, attacked Thomas Hardy, and was in turn attacked by John Middleton Murry. In each case the device employed was to pick out some passage or passages that were carelessly written, and to ask triumphantly: Is that what you call good English? Mr. Beach does this to Dreiser, Brooks, Hergesheimer, and Van Vechten, while invoking Moore

and Hardy as supreme masters, beyond reproach. To my mind, whether what he says of the Americans is correct, or not, is of little importance, since he does not apply his tests impartially. He quotes a passage from John Dewey and declares that it is incomprehensible until he has transliterated it into his own English. I, for one, reply that I read the passage as Dewey wrote it and understand it perfectly. It is longer, but no clearer in Mr. Beach's version.

The essay on Carl Van Vechten is, it seems to me, the worst example of what looks like pure bias. With many of Mr. Van Vechten's affectations of style and subject Professor Beach is out of sympathy. Doubtless there are others who agree with him. If he had omitted the question of style, and discussed the composition of Van Vechten's novels, his attempt to prove him a very derivative author, skilled in all sorts of tricks to cover up the weak spots in his narratives, might have stood on its own legs, as a counterblast to the vogue of this writer. Instead he tries to convict him of bad writing by an exceedingly unfair test. He manufactures what he calls a typical Van Vechten passage by piling up all the rare and obsolete words which the latter has scattered through his books. By an irony of criticism, when I saw this passage, isolated from its context, I thought it was written by Mr. Rosenfeld. It is much closer to his normal style and does not in any way illustrate either the virtues or the defects of Mr. Van Vechten.

To sum up, the point of most of Professor Beach's criticism is blunted by his enthusiasms. He clearly is blind to the defects of authors whom he happens to like. James Branch Cabell, Henry Mencken, and Stuart P. Sherman are the best of his enthusiasms, and if Van Wyck Brooks offends him by his "scientific jargon," how, I wonder, does he swallow the legal, medical, and theological jargon which Mr. Mencken so frequently and so effectively employs? "What American prose most lacks is flavor," he writes. "Too often it lacks precision as well, but not so often it lacks flavor." Theoretically Professor Beach is sound, but what is his practice? Are precision and flavor the virtues of such prose as Waldo Frank's and Paul Rosenfeld's? Is Van Vechten anything other than precise, and surely the flavor of his writing is so definite that certain nostrils prefer fare that is less "gamey"? With as much space at one's disposal one could take all the authors mentioned in this book, preserve the criticism but reverse the quotations, and prove in the end that those whom Mr. Beach praises can be blamed for exactly the same defects as characterize the writers whom he censures. From which I conclude that he is an untrustworthy guide to the maze of contemporary American prose.

For the Happy Few

DESERT, A LEGEND. By MARTIN ARMSTRONG. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1926. \$2.50.

THE publishers are to be congratulated on the format they have given Mr. Armstrong's "Legend." As a piece of commercial book-making it is admirable. The individual page is a delight to the eye; the cover is both striking and appropriate; and the strong, interesting woodcuts by E. Ravilious are immensely above the ordinary "illustration" in design and suggestive quality. It is evident the publishers felt they were dealing with a beautiful text which well deserved something more than the perfunctory care of the market-place. They have treated it with respect as a work of art.

Martin Armstrong is master of a firm, dignified, yet sensitive prose style. What he writes is literature—a statement which could be made of how many living writers of English prose? He has retold here a familiar legend of the Thebaid, and seldom has any legend been more thoughtfully and exquisitely rehandled. The precision, restraint, grave cadences of his narrative will doubtless prove caviare to the hundred thousand readers nourished on the movies, comic strips, crook plays, and gutter journalism. But we are not wholly uncivilized. There are among us those who care for what is completely organized, fine in texture, consistent in tone. It will be a pity if—in our present welter of blurbs, blurbs, blurbs—Mr. Armstrong's fit audience fails to discover him. I commend his legend of Malchus and Helena—in the proud words of Stendhal's dedication of "La Chartreuse de Parme"—to the happy few.

The BOWLING GREEN

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE
CAVE CANEM

TAking my evening stroll
I cautiously keep to the woodland alley
Turning back before reaching the neighbor's houses
To avoid startling any of the dogs.
It might be well, I ponder,
If one could do thus in the mind also,
Warily retracing one's thoughts
Before arousing the outcry
Of some indignant hound.

MEDITATION ON THE HEARTH

A householder who has once
Had a fire in the chimney
Will perhaps be careful
Before he again puts a match
To a bundle of excelsior.

VIGILIAE ALBAE

Now I am silent and my name is Tacitus.
But in this douce brightness
I have to pause now and then
Putting the moon behind the pine tree
To give myself respite
From her cruel and insinuating lustre.
Oh moon, scratch-pad of poets,
More meant against than meaning!

A QUATRAIN OMITTED BY A MANCHU PESSIMIST

Earth's maniac foison nothing cares
To head your pretty rhymes and sorrows:
See, in the anthill she prepares
Her million billion calm tomorrows.

VARIATIONS ON BUDDHIST SAPPHICS

If it should happen in somebody's office
That you were offered a noggin of cognac
And had to drink it in a cup of cardboard,

You would not dare to degust it leisurely:
You must drink fast, before the vivid essence
Ate through the seam of the chaste little vesicle.

So if we propose, my frolicsome people,
To pour great poetry in the crimped paper
Sterilized lilycups of daily behavior,
Series of neat little days from containers,
Caulk them with paraffin—
Or drink in a hurry.

COMPLAINT

Operator, operator!
There must be some mistake?
I keep ringing Bliss 42
And get Don't Answer.

TREMOLO UNDERFOOT

Walking the sunny pavement of Park Avenue
I study the inscriptions
On Saint Bartholomew's Church:
To Love That Word
And Both To Preach And Receive The Same
Great Shall Be The Peace Of Thy Children
Under my feet
I feel the strong stone shiver with a grand central
rumble,
The tremendous hurry of trains.

PARVIS E GLANDIBUS. QUERCUS

Great poets do not
Publish too often:
Oaks keep their leaves
When other trees are bare.

WRITTEN IN GREEK

When you see it written in Greek
You realize that her name wasn't Sappho
But Sapfo.
I shan't attempt to prove it
As the printer who does this paper
Hasn't any Greek type.
Besides, it's a matter
That concerns only the ladies.

MINUET WITH AN INTERVIEWER

My opinions about literature?
But I have no opinions at ten A. M.
I wipe the slate clean when I go to bed
And rise every morning
To consider the world *de novo*.
To begin the day with an opinion
Is to be a traitor to the Future.

Say, that's pretty good, that's a good line,
She remarked calmly.
Don't worry, Mr. Mandarin; if you haven't any
opinions
The *Evening Lens* will give you some.

Come back about dusk, my dear,
That's when I begin to have Good Ideas.
And I heard the Old Mandarin say to his manager
Isn't she a little pippin?
I hope she will.

LUCUBRATION BY DAYLIGHT

Europeans are aware
That life is a dangerous impossibility
To be managed as gracefully as may be;
But the fundamental American notion
Is that it's a Business Proposition:
That if they all Pull Together
And coin the right slogan
Something can be Done About It.

The Joke of it is,
Continued the egregious Old Asiatic,
That they're probably both wrong.
Meanwhile, It's queer how your Sidecar cocktails
Nibble the calves of my legs.

IN THE PEOPLE'S GAS BUILDING

"You're thinner, aren't you?" said Sid Avery,
The delightful bookseller.
"Yes," he replied, "I am thinner.
I've been thinking."
"No," said Sid, fixing the old babler with a
crystalline eye,
"No, you haven't been thinking.
You've been wondering."
And there was loud applause.

MODESTY

There can be no doubt at all, said the Old Mandarin,
You have a very cultured country.
Your plays, written by Irishmen and Czechoslavs,
Are directed by Russians
In theatres designed by Viennese architects
And filled with ladies beautiful in French modes,
Men tailored in the London manner.
Your fine printers learn their tricks in Germany
And when I saw that collection of Aubrey
Beardsleys
At the Anderson Galleries
I realized at last
Why America is such a great nation—
The only really modest country in the world,
Not too picayune to recognize fine work
Even if the other people did it.

Your book and art collectors are busy collecting
Just the Right Things
That have been OK'd by the authorities—
But Lord, what a marvellous land it must be
For the man who likes to make up his mind for
himself:
He has so little competition.

COMEDIE AMERICAINE

Two young Americans, still unblemished by thought,
Sat behind me at the Comédie Francaise.
"What sort of a show is this?" he said.
"A French comedy," she replied, in her mischievous
little chirp,
"Something about a bourgeois gentleman."
"Sure," he said, "but what kind of a comedy?
I mean, is it like The Poor Nut?
Or is it like The Creaking Chair?"
Just then came the three bangs
Announcing the rise of the curtain,
And I heard him grumble
"Gosh, isn't that a crude way of doing things."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.