

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.



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Books of Special Interest

Pluviculture

RAIN MAKING AND OTHER WEATHER VAGARIES. By W. J. HUMPHREYS. Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Co. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER MCADIE
Harvard University

ON the jacket of the book, the publishers say that it is an "entertaining and instructive account of the attempt to control rain by magical, religious, or scientific means;" and not fully satisfied with this effort, they add that it is "fascinating, instructive, and diverting." To all of this we agree. But no author is to be held strictly accountable for a publisher's state of mind, and we think our author does much better when he, with proper modesty, describes his work as a "study in *pluviculture*." The word was introduced if not originated by Dr. David Starr Jordan, dweller under the shade of Palo Alto (the tall pine), where the days are glorious and the rains are golden, when they come on time. But alas, it is a land overrun if not infested with spurious rain makers.

Professor Humphreys goes the good Doctor one better, for he bowls us over with the term *meteorological mumpsimus* which, in the vernacular of the campus, is in itself quite a mouthful. He translates it for us, as "stupid weather errors stubbornly held to despite all rational explanations."

We have a fellow feeling for any display of heat in calling down the rain wizards, as an enlightened press headlines them. Men who have devoted their lives to scientific investigation of problems connected with weather do get riled when the public falls for certain schemes of weather control put forward by half-baked exploiters, and more frequently by some who never even saw the inside of an oven, the oven in this case being an elementary course in physics. The dear public ought not to be fooled; but nevertheless the dear public apparently likes to be fooled; and that being the case what can a poor professor do but show exasperation as he bares his tired soul for the hundredth time?

In this review we need not go deeply into the scientific aspects of the case for and against rain making. Calculations of thermal energy do not appeal to the average reader who cares only for results. It is enough at present to say that control of the clouds is a long way off, though it would be rash to say that man will never succeed in modifying his zographic environment.

Readers of *The Saturday Review* will find the book sufficiently diverting. Dr. Humphreys has the pen of a ready writer, and has a balanced sense of humor. The prefatory Rhyme of the Rain-maker by no less a person than Dr. Frank Wigglesworth Clarke, the distinguished chemist of the Geological Survey, is a gem. We might have expected it. For every now and then a sober-minded chemist, or physicist, or even a mathematician, will break out with *eruptio poetatis*, a malady which forces them to scratch clean paper with light-minded verse. This particular scratch was published in *Life*, thirty-five years ago; but is still fresh and to the point.

Space will not allow us to quote much from the book, but one or two bits are worth reprinting.

"To get rain, the Arabs of North Africa fling a holy man into a spring." For our part we would much prefer to wait for the rain rather than drink from that particular spring.

"The women of Kursk, southern Russia, break a trying drought by capturing a passing stranger, and forcibly either throw him into a river or else souse him well from tip to toe."

"But the farthest removed and most vicarious of all these wettings that rain might come is that of the Armenians who drench neither themselves nor yet their priest, but the priest's wife."

And finally we hark back to the last stanza of that literary gem from a professional geological chemist. It is still the preferred plan for stopping rain when all other methods fail:

To check the flood you started, I've heard
All efforts were in vain;
Util the Bureau at Washington stirred,
And stopped the storm with a single word,
By just predicting—Rain!

Inheritance Taxes

THE TAXATION OF INHERITANCE. By WILLIAM J. SCHULTZ. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by PHILIPS COAN

MR. SCHULTZ, whose work on the taxation of inheritance forms the latest addition to the series of winners of the Hart, Schaffner and Marx prize, has performed an important service in chronicling and discussing the general movement among nations in the past quarter century toward an expanding use of this form of levy. He points out that there has been before the American reader no more recent work than that of Max West, of which the second edition appeared in 1908. The resort of the United States Government to sharply progressive estate duties dates from 1916, and the trouble over coinciding Federal and State inheritance taxes reached its height some years later. The period of the European war and of the financial restoration following it witnessed extension of inheritance taxation in many countries. These recent developments are now for the first time treated comprehensively from the American point of view.

For his presentation of the early history of inheritance taxes Dr. Schultz has admittedly based his work on the writings of Schanz and other Europeans. The early period in this preponderantly modern fiscal form may be said to extend to the outset of the present century. Wisely, it seems, the author has put in the lead that half of his book which comprises the historical narrative of legislation and fiscal policies in the countries chiefly involved. The time has hardly come when the critical consideration of the results, and of the incidental effects of the prevalent type of heavily progressive death tax would have a sufficient groundwork of demonstrated fact to raise it to the chief prominence in the scheme of such a work. In a brief chapter on the incidence and economic consequences of the inheritance tax, Dr. Schultz none the less expresses some interesting views. Hardship is caused in the United States, in his opinion, by the cash requirement upon taxed estates, which often renders necessary forced sales of their resources at inadequate prices. He rejects, somewhat briefly and summarily, Secretary Mellon's contention that forced sales of decedents' resources tend to cause in the aggregate a continuous depression in the capital markets. In pointing out that the custom of commuting the inheritance tax into an annual duty, by means of taking out life insurance to the amount of the expected payment, assimilates the tax to a duty on incomes, he brings to bear a strong argument against the long held view that the inheritance levy has a peculiar destructive effect on capital.

Opposing opinions of the schools holding that the tax weakens the incentive to capital accumulation, and that it strengthens this incentive, he dismisses alike, venturing the risky middle view that the reaction on business initiative is "very little one way or the other." The test of so broad a statement would be to ask the author whether he thought that a 100 per cent tax on estates would not lessen the saving initiative. It seems likely that there exists an optimum point below which the tax stimulates accumulation and above which it discourages it.

It will be of interest to many American readers to learn that the Union Death duties Act of 1922 superseded altogether the separate and overlapping taxes previously imposed by subdivisions of the South African Union. No such degree of simplification and of release from anomalies and excesses of plural taxation seems yet in sight in the United States. The history of recent State and Federal lawmaking in this country as Dr. Schultz presents it seems at least to show an encouraging effort in some of the States to abate this patent evil, even at some financial loss. In his exposition of these and other laws, Dr. Schultz is clear, wastes no words, and speaks with the plain and definite tone that commonly means mastery of the facts to be conveyed.

The first of the three monographs which the German Reichsarchiv purposes to devote to the battle of Verdun has now appeared (Oldenburg: Stalling). "Die Tragödie von Verdun: Die Deutsche Offensiveschlacht," by L. Gold and Major M. Reymann, gives a strategic outline of the initial phases of the battle.



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