

## Books and Printing

THE KINGDOM OF BOOKS. By WILLIAM DANA ORCUTT. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1927.

BOOKS AND BIDDERS. By A. S. W. ROSEN-  
BACH. The same.

Reviewed by CARL ROLLINS

THIS is Mr. Orcutt's second adventure into the field of popular treatises on printing, and like the earlier volume, "In Quest of the Perfect Book," it is a commingling of well-known facts about printers, binders, and collectors with personal experiences as author, printer, and connoisseur. One recognizes Mr. Orcutt's pretty considerable familiarity with his subject, but one misses that air of straightforward simplicity which puts one at ease with the writer. The style is too stilted and involved and, one had almost said, regal. It would seem as if he had deliberately avoided the Republic of Letters for the Kingdom of Books—the simile of "prime minister" by which term he designates various great printers is consistent but hardly felicitous. Such a statement as that "printing in the sixteenth century had changed from an art to a liberal art" is not true, in view of the practical nature of all printing down to the modern cult of the private press. One is irritated at these absurdities.

But in a time when popular interest in printing is widespread, those who crave knowledge need something to read on the subject. In so involved and bewildering a field there is much to be said, and many must say it. Mr. Orcutt's book will be of interest and value to those who are trying to learn their way about in the mazes of printing—it will teach them something about books and especially about fine books. The illustrations, with their adequate captions will help the casual reader to understand why some of the masterpieces of printing have come to be accepted as such. The chapter on the perennially interesting Plantin Museum, with reproductions of Pennell's drawings, is a glimpse at the past through a splendid doorway. The chapter on the bookstalls along the Seine is perhaps the best portion of the book—a pleasant picture of the allurements of book collecting without too much stress on that useful but sometimes obstreperous figure, the book merchant.

The reviewer may be on dangerous ground in suggesting that the middle-man is not quite a pleasant figure in the picture. Quantitatively he bulks large; when a comparatively modest book, as a result of auction bidding, increases in value ten or twenty times in a few years, a commercial nation sits up and takes notice. Such a situation annoys the craftsman, but by the same token it thrills a commercial people. And that explains the fascination of Mr. Rosenbach's recital of his adventures.

These essays were first printed in the magazines, which explains repetitions and the conversational style. They deal with the joys and sorrows of the book-buyer and collector (for Mr. Rosenbach's own collection is of no negligible proportions) and the influence which that Philadelphia dealer of a former day, Moses Pollock, had on his young and impressionable nephew. A multitude of experiences in Europe and America—in libraries, English mansions, auction rooms—told with gusto and a good memory make entertainment for the reader. And throughout one feels that the writer has a very real feeling for the books he talks of—even a sentimental affection, as in the case of the nine-year old Matilda Walker's letter to General Beauregard about the Confederate flag.

But it is after all the auction room and the mart which predominate. Prices and rarity and the unholy joy of possessing what another cannot have; the stories of the captains of industry collecting books as they collected railways; the professional suggestion that the book collector should trust to a competent dealer; all give just a little false impression of what is, if justly pursued, a noble avocation—that of collecting books.

"Devout Johnsonians," says *John O'London's Monthly*, "generally confine their worship of the many-sided John Bull of Letters in the eighteenth century to his purely literary works. Yet by his rare knowledge of the science and manufactures of his day, his interest in aviation, his prescience of gas lighting, etc., he was the forerunner of writers like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. In those then unpopular subjects, he towered above all his contemporaries as monumental as Mont Pilatus, and as lonely as Keats's 'peak in Darien.'"

## Mr. Moon's Notebook

December 28: *The Unbecoming Gravity of Age*

I FEEL, glancing back at what I last wrote in this notebook, the intrusion of an extremely serious tone. And at first I thought, it must be age; and next I thought (and I think more truly), it cannot be age, for gravity so ill becomes age. In that age is an illness, age is grave; but inasmuch as age is merely growing older. . . .

It is hard to say when in life one feels oldest, in the sense of feeling most sober. I remember at a Christmastime dance when I was less than twenty that it suddenly occurred to me that I was a cynic. I have never enjoyed a dance so much. I imparted the information to every girl who honored me with a waltz or two-step. They seemed actually rather interested. One recalls the Blighted Being of Aldrich's "Story of a Bad Boy." But the Blighted Being was younger. This was the next step. I was not blighted. I was simply utterly disillusioned. I had a most enjoyable time with one particularly sympathetic girl with whom I sat out a whole dance explaining just how disillusioned I was. She took me entirely seriously, as I took myself; she confessed to like tendencies which she strove bravely to conquer with the fascinating "crooked smile" that was all the rage in those days. What a bond we found; how often and how "crookedly" we smiled at each other without sickening!

I know little about the youth of today, about those around twenty. They rather terrify me. And the "line" is entirely different. But probably most of them are, nevertheless, quite as disillusioned cynics as I was then. Now, at twice that age, my vanity prides itself on its artlessness. It skirts the waters of Marah carefully twitching aside its garment. For we have waded those waters in the years between, once and again,—some of us have even swum those waters and have nearly sunk. Purple pessimism is glorious in youth, because it is Jaques sucking melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs,—it all comes under the head of pleasure. It rests in the clouds of romance. But after actual encounters with the smiler with the knife I do believe that the more philosophical incline more and more toward frivolity. That is the reason for my heading to this instalment. Contrary to accepted opinion gravity ill becomes age. And wherever age means a growth in philosophy you will find a good deal of merriment and quite a bit of flippancy. Life has done its worst and the somewhat battered are still in the ring, touched with a certain proper exhilaration.

\* \* \*

I myself, being at present but middle-aged, have not yet attained that blessed state. Life still has the power to appall and terrify me. I am still prone to anger on the one hand, and, on the other, to the belief that my goodness is sometimes positively saintly. This is all very bad, very immature. I am still too much in and a part of the spectacle. Only when one begins to realize that life actually is more amusing than we thought is a finely frivolous senescence assured. I hope I shall live to be merrily half-witted under the burden of my years.

Old men don't necessarily want to crouch in the chimney corner. Aside from the bad old men, who want to be really devilish, (and I cannot find it in my heart at this moment to chide them) there are the old men that—well, John Crowe Ransom has a poem somewhere about an old man dressing up like an Indian with the small boys and dancing around their bonfire in the backyard. He was tired of the chimney corner indoors. He wanted to express how he really felt. His spirit was infernally spry.

Very young people think age is so awful. I did, I know. Young girls if proposed to by a man of say thirty are sometimes hard put to it to disguise from him their horror at his senility. It is (I find it hard to avoid the triteness) all a matter of perspective. The present epoch is such an age of youth that debutantes are most impatient of grandmothers and grandmothers make the mistake of trying to act like debutantes. That also I can understand, but that last is not to escape the unbecoming gravity of age, which is not a matter of dress or figure or suiting somebody else. It is a matter, really, of suiting yourself. A good many elders suit a mere convention. They are supposed to be stiff with dignity or full of wise saws or bearded like the pard or a necessary balance-wheel or any number of things that are actually alien to them. There are the

natural physical handicaps of age,—but then, on the other hand, there are the natural mental handicaps of youth. Two young men of my acquaintance once announced that when they were old men they intended to spend their time drinking beer in a cellar and throwing the bottles through the windows with raucous mirth. I do not, of course, prescribe excesses of this kind. Yet I should rather see them than witness any too great gravity. And probably as I write this I am still too young, in a comparative sense, to realize just how ponderous and platitudinous I shall be when I have entered on the home-stretch.

But even if I am I won't approve of it! The social pressure may be too strong, but, if I can, I shall try to organize such Aged as I can get hold of to pursue nonsensical later careers. I hope that most of them will be undignified and do things unbecoming. Most of them will have deserved a good fling. I shall not encourage them to ape anything the young consider their prerogative or to step out of their own character, but merely to realize that they have still a great deal in them worthy of expression. The aged are apt to think that life has been pretty depressing, on the whole, and of course it has; but what of it,—everybody finds it so. That cloud need not obscure a few final rosy horizons. This creeping to the grave that the mid-Victorians found so morbid an interest is now entirely outdated. One of the meanest remarks in the world is that old favorite, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself at your age!" It is usually aimed at any elderly wight who is merely trying to have a bit of innocent fun before sunset.

There should be dignity in one's preparations for departure; oh yes, if you mean what I mean by dignity; but dignity, at that, is a dangerous word; let us say, rather, intelligence. Well intelligence is not incompatible with gaiety and the exercise of charm. I do not advocate a reckless selfishness on the part of the aged; I do not advocate it for myself or for the young. But the aged certainly should have no reason to feel that they are out of the running. If they choose to sink without a struggle into desuetude and to take no further interest in what is going on around them, or to find their chief pleasure in going over and over the past, that is their own lookout; but back-numbers can frequently be just as interesting as new numbers.

Youth has been having a beautiful time in the centre of the stage for several decades now, and it is fitting that we brought age forward, to take its own applause,—not in holy reverence or for any high moral purpose, but because older people have been taking a browbeating—a highbrowbeating—in the novels alone of the last twenty years that has crowded them quite unfairly back into the shadows. If youth and age cannot live together, let youth step out of the limelight for a while, at least, and let the aged advance decorously to cavort. I know they have it in them.

It was quite right, as that great higher mathematician proved to us of yore, for Father William incessantly to stand upon his head. How logical was his explanation. In youth he had eschewed the feat for fear of injury to the intellect. In age he realized the brain's limitations, in fact he doubted his possession of a brain. And Youth's questioning of Father William's quiet if peculiar amusements finally aroused proper irritation. Lewis Carroll's poem stoutly buttresses my contention. Gravity belongs to youth. Age's only desire should be to avoid it—even, by gymnastics, specifically to alter its gravity. In Father William the attempt was praiseworthy. Old people should be allowed to stand on their heads. They should be encouraged in any other excellent and odd calisthenics they elect. How much better, in the late afternoon of life, to engage in any happy foolishness than to sit meditating a dismal curtain.

The gravity of youth can often be charming, the gravity of age is merely proof of unjust oppression by younger generations more physically active. That is my story and I shall stick to it. Of course we have been taught otherwise. Age itself has for ages been misled into the belief that it must pull a long face and wane darkly. Nay! Nay! Up the Aged! On with the Greybeards' Gala! Need I remind you of that moss-grown adage, He Laughs Best who Laughs Last?

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

(To be continued)

## A Trio of German Novels

### THE MAN WHO CONQUERED DEATH.

By FRANZ WERFEL. Translated by Clifton F. Fadiman and William A. Drake. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1927. \$1.50.

THE FIFTH CHILD. By KLAUS MANN. Translated by Lambert Armour Shears. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927. \$1.50.

THE DAYS OF THE KING. By BRUNO FRANK. Translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$2.50.

JUDGED by its literature, Germany, with the possible exception of Russia, is the only nation to have profited spiritually by the recent war. The literary work of the new Russia is still too little known to enter into the discussion. But of western nations Germany alone seems to possess a group of young writers of major quality who have made a definitely new and positive contribution to world literature. In France the empty negations of dadaism and *surréalisme*, the equally empty affirmations of the quasi-Catholic revival, and the charming chatter of Paul Morand and Valéry Larbaud, have left the pre-war veterans Gide and Valéry, in possession of all the permanent honors; in England also, with few exceptions, the best of the post-war literature has been written by the older men and in the older style; in America the pin-pricks of repression and the absurdities of our political and social life have aroused the spirit of laughter, gay or grim according to temperament, rather than any more profound reaction. But while the victors in the recent war have revealed themselves in their literature as nervous, unstrung, not a little bewildered and helpless at the turn of events, the vanquished seem to have emerged spiritually stronger, more firmly knit, more deeply defiant of adverse fate. Young Germany has doffed its sentimentalism without putting on the garb of cynicism. In the work of its newer writers, however individually divergent, there is a community of fearlessness—a probing of tragic issues which is more like that of the older Russia than of the older Germany but done with an esthetic austerity alike un-Russian and, hitherto, un-German.

The three writers here reviewed differ greatly in style and choice of theme, yet Till, the unvanquishable rebel of Klaus Mann's "Fifth Child," is the own brother of the hero of Werfel's "Goat Song," while Werfel's doddering Fiala, the "man who conquered death," is a brother of Bruno Frank's doddering but unconquerable Frederick the Great. The characters of all three writers are moved by forces more powerful than themselves; all are but partially revealed, giving a sense of unplumbed depths within them; all are splendidly isolated, standing starkly against a dark background of nothingness. In each case the realistic technique is exalted by an undefinable, pervasive mysticism. In each case the self-consciousness of the writer leads him to attempt what might easily have proved a mere *tour de force* of technical cleverness but for depth of passion and high seriousness of thought.

Werfel's "The Man Who Conquered Death" is the most implacable study of dissolution since Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan Ilyitch." A poor, broken-down old watchman whose only dignity rests on his memories of better days, is stricken with pneumonia and will lose the life insurance for his wife and epileptic son if he dies before his next birthday. That critical date is January fifth, and it is now only the middle of November. Day by day we follow the progress of the disease; long before the first of January the doctors have given up their patient; his pain-wracked, disfigured body presents only a ghastly semblance of a human being; but something lives on in him,—call it "will," call it "a complex," call it "God,"—which does not consent to die until the appointed day is past. The pictures which the book brings before the outer eye are at the beginning sordid and at the end hideous; only to the inner eye are they suffused with beauty. For Anatole France's formula of "pity and irony" Werfel substitutes "pity and respect"—but his attitude can be learned only inferentially, not directly from his style which, at least in this instance, is one of iron objectivity.

Klaus Mann, son of Thomas of "Buddenbrooks," is a gentler spirit than Franz Werfel in whom a vein of savagery lurks not far below the surface. "The Fifth Child" starts almost as an idyll of childhood

—the simple story of the life of four delightfully imaginative children of a dead radical philosopher, and of their pale, beautiful, uncomprehending mother who is neither imaginative nor radical and who, having never understood their father or learned the meaning of passion, spends her days calmly, sweetly, still unawakened. Into their quiet existence comes a young disciple of the philosopher, whose free adventurous spirit wins first the hearts of the children, than that of the mother, but never yields his own. Pursued by the despairing love of this woman of forty, he acquiesces in her desires, then departs, still free. But the coming of his child, her first child of love, brings fruition to her spirit, and the fifth child makes her a real mother for the first time.

\* \* \*

Bruno Frank can probably say more in less compass than either of the other two writers. In fact, the three slight vignettes of the aged Frederick the Great which make up "The Days of the King" are as characterization worth the whole of Carlyle's elaborate three volumes. The experience of reading these sketches is almost as impressive as meeting their hero in actual life must have been. Little enough happens: in "The Lord Chancellor" Frederick dismisses a minister; in "The Cicatrice" he talks with an old friend; in "Alcmene" he reviews his troops and then hastens to Potsdam to the corpse of his favorite dog. But the dismissal is an unjust way of establishing justice for all Prussia: Frederick takes advantage of a plausible allegation of corruption to get rid of a really incorruptible man whose traditional loyalties nevertheless stand in the way of a necessary revision of the legal code; and the incident enables Bruno Frank to bring before us in matchless manner Frederick the Great as he appeared and as he was—slovenly of dress, shrill of voice, unkingly of speech, yet determined to be a beneficent god to his subjects whom he despised. The talk with an old friend tells the story of his sex life and gives Frederick's own Freud-like interpretation of his career. The merciless review of troops in a frightful downpour with Frederick, cloakless, shivering, ill, sparing neither others nor himself, is an unforgettable rendering of the martial spirit; the dénouement of Frederick weeping bitterly over his dearest friend, a dead dog, is a masterpiece of tragic irony. Bruno Frank's small volume is packed so full of characterization that one might spend pages in discussion of it. The incidents are fictitious, but the Frederick whom it reveals is the real Frederick of the historic "Letters"—complex, contradictory, intellectual, passionate, skeptical, and brave—a great man and a fascinating great man. The book is appropriately printed in an old French type of much beauty, and it is unusually well translated. The publishers announce that it is the first of a whole series of recent German works about to be published in English; if the others are equal to their harbinger it is safe to say that this will be the most important serial publication of the coming year.

## Portrait and Chronicle

OUR MR. DORMER. By R. H. MOTTRAM.

New York; Lincoln Mac Veagh, The Dial Press. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MARY ELLEN CHASE  
Smith College

IN these days of the subjective and egocentric novel when *Weltschmerz* is put to rout by the anguish of the individual and a kind of pulsing disillusionment serves at once as motivation and conclusion of the whole matter, one is refreshed and cheered by so objective, solid, delightful, and altogether satisfying book as "Our Mr. Dormer." Mr. R. H. Mottram obviously does not belong to that brood of Calibans, who, taught language, profit by it only in knowing "how to curse." There are far too many of them among us. He is concerned, first of all, with painting a portrait for the sake of its worthy and captivating subject, and, second, with relating that subject to the century in which he lived his submissive, resolute, and tenacious life.

And what a portrait it is,—full, whimsical, accurate! That which hung in the hall of Doughtys' Bank one hundred years after Mr. Dormer's day is but a pale reflection of the living Mr. Dormer, presented for our delectation by Mr. Mottram, who, reminiscent as he is of both, contends for high honors with Arnold Bennett of "The Old Wives'

Tale" and with Charles Dickens. Mr. Dormer on that morning in 1813, standing on the steps of Doughtys' Bank in Easthampton, unmindful of the "senseless, nomad wind," the "watery, uncertain sun," Mr. Dormer at his dinner, "a slight reminiscence in his attitude still of a laborer eating bread and cheese, seated on a tree stump, but amply at ease in his elbow chair, masticating slowly and solemnly, looking at nothing," Mr. Dormer asleep with the fitful sun shining and fading on his head. Leisurely, careful, and satisfactory as is the latter half of the book, which part presents Mr. Dormer's son and grandson, it holds no pages equal to these that paint and chronicle Our Mr. Dormer himself. One reads them a second time and yet a third, regretful of their passage. Mr. Dormer, "a man of peaceful habit but English to the core" defends by a deadly weapon the honor and credit of Doughtys' Bank at midnight on the coach from London. He attends in pages memorable for their loveliness his wife's funeral at the Friends' Meeting House in Dog Lane. Again for the sake of Doughtys' Bank he suffers ignominy and ridicule at the most charming of Water Parties, to which, as the Doughtys' cashier, he has no entrance. And finally, when in an unforgettable scene he has been rewarded by the Quaker brothers and bankers with a virtual partnership, he goes home to his dinner in Middens Alley without any outward sign to his associates that he is in the least excited.

\* \* \*

But Mr. Dormer is more than a portrait. He is the embodiment as well as the symbol of that Quaker tenacity, calm, and almost paradoxical vision upon which was solidly built the English credit system of the nineteenth century. Hence his portrait and those of his son and grandson are in a larger sense the history of provincial banking in England; and Mr. Mottram's book, quite aside from its charm as a story, is a valuable chronicle of English economic history.

Mr. Mottram's style, to use two of his favorite adjectives, is leisurely and sure. His thoughtfulness and accuracy in choice of words are fit subjects for rejoicing in these times of careless and hasty composition. His delicate use of concrete detail is sparing enough to be more appreciated when it is used. One will remember "those rather ethereal lime trees" that grace the little yard leading to the Meeting House, the gleaming dish-covers and "snoring fire" in the old kitchen in Middens Alley, the drifts of garden scents trailing "in the general atmosphere of hay and sunshine." Let us trust he will use his divining-rod again—and as soon as may be!

## Art and the Octopus

SIXTH ANNUAL OF ADVERTISING ART.  
New York: The Art Directors' Club. 1927.  
\$8.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

I WAS weaned on the first book of the international poster, in the days when Penfield was Penfield and Phil May, even, was Phil May. I can remember the designs of Grasset and somebody's spectacular cats. No, I don't mean Oliver Herford's—these were French cats, masterpieces of design in black and white. I recall reproductions of Parisian theatrical posters of high kicking black silk-stockinged ladies in a surf of nether undergarments, in the days when legs were a treat,—all sorts of wicked Parisian posters of the masked He and She, with a Beardsleyish imp leering around the corner. I can remember being the proud possessor of some of Florence Lundborg's rarely charming posters for Gelett Burgess's *Lark* published by Doxey in San Francisco . . . The Old Gentleman interested in Illustration shows his Medals. . . .

Today illustrators are legion and posters are no longer confined to advertising the theatre or an occasional old family standby like Pears or Ivory Soap. And billboards are only a paragraph in the whole story. That earliest book over which as an inky schoolboy I pored fascinatedly in idle hours built lots of its most animated designs around the bicycle. Well, they still bicycle in England, and I still love the idea of a bicycle; but it is completely off the hoardings. You might as well plan your space to include the leg-o'-mutton sleeve.

Today, to judge by this handsome volume before me, even a painter like Ignacio Zuloaga takes a hand in the great American game; not that the famous did not stoop to the poster of old! Etienne Drian