

Courtier and Poet

AT THE COURT OF QUEEN ELIZABETH. THE LIFE AND LYRICS OF SIR EDWARD DYER. By *Ralph M. Sargent*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by CHARLES DAVID ABBOTT

EDWARD DYER was one of the lesser ornaments of Elizabeth's reign. Courtier, diplomat, poet, he had neither the ebullience of Raleigh nor the capacity of Sidney, but he was Sidney's friend, the companion of poets, and, at various times, a minor favorite of Elizabeth. His name has always been familiar and his character respected, but it is somewhat difficult to discover upon what achievements his reputation was built.

He was sent on several diplomatic errands of no great importance, and these he accomplished satisfactorily. His exploits, however, were not physical. They were confined to the sphere of alchemical experiment, in which his faith was even more unflinching than was that of Elizabeth and Burghley. The most romantic episode of his life was his highly dangerous association with the notorious Edward Kelley, whom, as the self-acknowledged transmutor of base metals into gold, he tried to lure away from the Emperor's court at Prague for the enrichment of England. At this time Burghley naively hoped that Kelley's ministrations might cover the cost of the defences against the Armada. Dyer returned unscathed to London, but it was not Kelley's gold that repelled the Spanish ships. Officially, he received from Elizabeth only one tangible recognition for his many years of unflinching courtliness; in 1596 he was made Chancellor of the Order of the Garter, a post that brought with it considerably more honor than power or financial profit. When he died in 1607 the extensive Somerset lands, which he had inherited from

his father, were barely sufficient to pay his debts.

To the majority of his contemporaries he was mainly a courtier and a gentleman. Poets and critics knew and admired in him also a refined poetic talent. Gabriel Harvey maintained that his "written devices farr excell most of the sonets, and cantos in print," Puttenham praised him "for elegie moste sweete, solempne and of high conceit." He was, however, too much the gentleman ever to have gathered into a volume his poetic compositions; they survive only in manuscript and in the miscellanies of the period. Some are certainly lost; others, if they still exist, are perhaps attributed to other men. But when his courtliness, his diplomacy, even his alchemy, were forgotten, his name still bore with it the true ring of the poet, and to hundreds of readers, especially after the frequent reprintings of Palgrave, he is known as the author of at least one great lyric, "My mind to me a kingdom is."

The court of Elizabeth is perhaps too frequently gauged through its giants. It could not, of course, have been entirely compound of Raleighs, Sidneys, Cecils, and Devereuxs. To see it afresh in its relations to a man of lesser stature like Dyer is both salutary and instructive. Mr. Sargent has done a commendable service to history and to letters in bringing together probably all that can ever be known about a man who was genuinely typical of his age without himself being great. Thorough scholarship, a humane understanding of the small man's difficulties, and a sense of dignity that prevents the specialist's enthusiasm for his subject from warping his judgments, all help to give to Mr. Sargent's book a quiet but distinctive importance. Moreover, it contains an authoritative text of all those poems which can unquestionably be attributed to Dyer.

Charles David Abbott is librarian of Buffalo University.

A Russian Childhood during the Revolution

THE LAND OF SHVAMBRANIA. By *Leo Kassil*. New York: The Viking Press. 1935. \$2.

Reviewed by VARVARA N. YAKOUNCHIKOFF

IN spite of its fantastic title, this is a novel about real life and real people. The author tells the story of his childhood in a small, out of the way town in Russia. But his purpose is not autobiography. The five or six years during which the story takes place are the most eventful in modern Russian history. The World War and the Revolution immediately following completely changed the physiognomy of the country not only politically and economically, but also psychologically. These most complicated and intricate psychological processes are what the author undertakes to describe.

By superimposing the states of mind in different social groups during the war and the "Kerensky Revolution," he succeeds in giving a fairly good idea of class contradictions at that particular time. When finally the Bolshevik Revolution comes, it is clear where and why the differentiation between reactionary and sympathetic elements takes place.

But it is not so much the class angle which interests the author. Rather, it is the psychological leap and sudden change of perspective in the minds of selfish, unconcerned residents of a provincial town who are transformed by the Revolution into people with an almost superhuman strength and courage that carries them through the years of horror, starvation, and death with an invincible faith in a new and better life. The revolutionary characters, like the commissar Chubarov and Stepka Gavria, under other circumstances would have been ordinary people, but the sweeping force of the Revolution impels them into heroic action. For the reader who wishes to know "more" about Russia, this book can be helpful, particularly for its delving into the psychology of the tremendous, pushing force which sustained the Russians during the Civil War and which still persists though in a different form.

If the "Land of Shvambrania" cannot be classified as a great novel, it is certainly among the best in Soviet literature. The simple and unaffected manner of the writer, the humorous style, and the clarity of structure make this book easy and decidedly interesting reading.

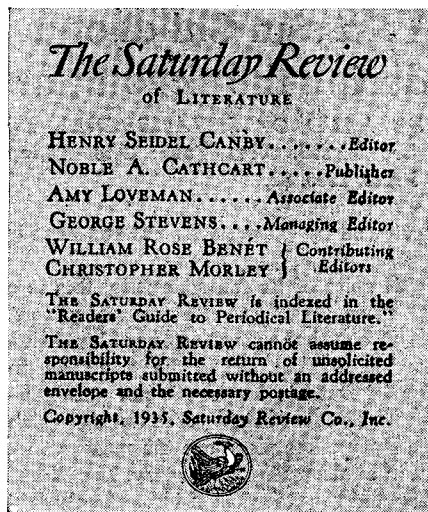
As far as the translation is concerned, it is for the most part satisfactory, particularly considering the difficulties the translators encountered in the idiomatic and local vernacular.

Varvara N. Yakouchikoff, a sister-in-law of the late Arthur Ruhl, is a musician who got her training in Soviet Russia and came to the United States two years ago.



QUEEN ELIZABETH KNIGHTING DRAKE ON THE GOLDEN HIND (1581)

From a drawing by Sir John Gilbert



Exit of a Humorist

THE writer of this editorial never knew Oliver Herford very well, though he first met him years ago in the offices of the old *Century Magazine*, and at one time inhabited the same storied old apartment house in which Mr. Herford lived and died, 142 East 18th Street. That is a truly famous house. Among its tenants the drama is represented by Clayton Hamilton, the publishing business by Eugene F. Saxton, and the highest flights of poetry and fantasy were the property of one of its erstwhile lessees, Elinor Wylie. It is next to the Huyler factory and near to Gramercy Park and the Players Club. That made it a particularly advantageous spot for Oliver, who was the prime wit of the Players, and is sure now to haunt the purlieus of that fine old club as the most charming of ghosts; a ghost who will doubtless continue to make shrewd and amusing remarks about the other club members. One feels sad that Oliver is gone, and yet one is not at all sure that he is gone. There was ever something rather unreal about him, to the casual acquaintance; something a little too good to be true, as though he had stepped out of one of his own drawings. He was always a little dim as a human being, dim with a sparkle. As though it were yesterday, I can see him standing by my desk in the gloomy old *Century* office rummaging in his pockets for little bits of paper. He had a new packet of drawings for "Frank"—who was Frank Crowninshield—but he had temporarily mislaid the verses that usually accompanied his drawings. Oh yes! Here they were. "Here it is, here it is, see what you think of it," in a rather dormousy or Alice-in-Wonderlandish voice. Probably it turned out to be a limerick about how an ounce (the animal) was put into a pound (like a dog pound). The accompanying picture was, of course, inimitable. And how beautifully Oliver drew! His style was God-given. He lifted the Persian kitten into eternity, and was, without effort, one of the truest geniuses of our time. I say this advisedly; for a genius is a person who causes

something to exist whereat you wonder how it was ever possible that it had not existed before. Had Oliver Herford's fascinating young ladies not emerged from his pen it would have been necessary to create them.

I think he drew the most altogether charming young ladies, as I know that he drew the most beguiling animals, of any illustrator of our time. I only disagreed with him once, when in his "Pen and Inklings" column in *Harper's Weekly* he took a fall out of Vachel Lindsay for Vachel's own extraordinary drawings. A genius himself, of sharp individuality, it seemed strange to me that he could not recognize the different but authentic genius of Lindsay.

Mr. Gilbert of the *World-Telegram* has spoken of the Oliver Herford of recent years as "a superannuated Puck," a sterling phrase. And yet I refuse to believe that any drift of years could superannuate Oliver, just as I entirely refuse to believe that Oliver is now non-existent. He is merely, it may be, putting a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes. To those who loved him and knew him intimately this may seem too flippant a way to speak, and yet it seems to me the truest tribute to the man I was once privileged only to meet, to speak of him in Carrollian or Edward Learian terms—not to say Shakespearian, as above! He now knows whether or not the Snark is a Boojum.

Certainly no artist was ever more impressed by the unexpectedness of this world or saw it better in its proper perspective. And back of his whimsical flights was an enviable sense of the fitness of things. When Oliver wrote of an elf, a dormouse, and a toadstool he could do so without treacle, he could do it also with wholly admirable onomatopoeic effect: "Tugged till the toadstool toppled in two." When he encountered the shoddy buncombe and vulgar snobbery of the big-towners he could write "The Women of the Better Class," and simply wipe the purse-proud idiots off the face of the earth:

Ermined and minked and Persian-lambled,
Be-puffed (be-painted, too, alas!)
Be-decked, be-diamonded—be-damned!
The Women of the Better Class.

That remains the most spirited and best defense of the real Bohemia, (aside from the fake one, which no one could detect more quickly than Mr. Herford) the land where values are real, where life is creative, and where no one is parasitic.

Oliver of the Artful Antics I loved from a child. Oliver the playwright I never knew. But if ever an artist richly deserved every reward that came his way it was this old-world gentleman beautiful and dim. He is one of two Englishmen who have brought honor to American illustration. The other is Reginald Birch. Both had perfect names and utterly characteristic styles.

This straying eulogium should, as it is

on the editorial page, make some telling point concerning the literary life. But Oliver lived a double one. He penned what he pictured and pictured what he penned. One cannot recall his best verses without seeing in the mind's eye the accompanying illustrations. One cannot divorce the pictures from the text. Therefore this particular artist was the favorite of fortune and the exception to most rules. The truest thing to say is that genius, of any kind, is always precisely that. That is why, sometimes, the dull wit of the world passes it by for the more accustomed thing. But Oliver was not passed by, because he was an entertainer.

What more natural than that he was akin to the folk of the stage. His wife, who had come from London with Cissie Loftus, first met him at the home of E. H. Soth-ern. It is a noble profession, that of entertainer, in any one of its various manifestations. Oliver was properly of the Club founded by Edwin Booth.

And so what editorial moral may be drawn? Well, perhaps this—that though Herford belongs, for his table-talk, among the best wits of all the ages, there was no real malice in him. There was simply and always delight. It was an intensely funny world with intensely funny people in it. And for the most part it was nonsensically innocent. And every now and again the Ithuriel spear of the world's beauty transfixed the poetic breast. There are plenty today to show us the sewers, the gutters, the refuse-heaps. There are few like Herford to lighten the heart and charm the brain. Ah, my masters—how ancient and honorable a profession it is to be a droll!

W. R. B.

Ten Years Ago

In the corresponding issue of 1925, *The Saturday Review* recommended "Barren Ground," by Ellen Glasgow. Archibald Henderson wrote: "When I encounter reviews of 'Barren Ground' entitled 'Realism Crosses the Potomac' or some such nonsense, I am staggered anew with the fortuity of fame . . . Realism crossed the Potomac twenty-five years ago, when Miss Glasgow wrote 'The Voice of the People.'" Mr. Henderson found "Barren Ground" a "superb study of the evolution of an individual, the growth of character under the grinding stress of individual folly and economic pressure . . . a great novel" . . . Ellen Glasgow's latest novel, "Vein of Iron," will be published in August.

Today

The *Saturday Review* Recommends these new books:

THE JURY. By Gerald Bullett. See review on page 5.

THE LAND OF SVAMBRANIA. By Leo Kassil. See review on page 7.