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## THE NEW BRITANNICA

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WHAT do you think of the new *Britannica*?" The question is an appalling one. It is like being asked, "What is your opinion of America?" An encyclopaedia with the history of the *Britannica* is continental in dimensions. It has as many aspects as life itself. To review the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would be to possess an encyclopaedic mind. Doubtless groups of scholars will undertake reviews of it, but surely no one person would think of such a daring adventure. Yet even a brief tour in America is better than never to have seen America at all, and perhaps this brief note on my impression of a summer's excursion into the fourteenth edition may be helpful to other general readers of such publications.

My tour lasted about four weeks. I was accompanied by a group of friends of various professions who journeyed with me, though less extensively, through many of the volumes. Thus my account, though general in nature, is to some extent composite and represents more than one point of view.

Wholeheartedly, then, I can commend to others a similar trip. The fourteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is one of the most potent instruments of adult education that have ever been devised. It is not merely a great compendium of facts covering man's world as known to the Twentieth Century. It is also a vast body of organized public opinion, treating some of the most difficult questions of the day, casting the weight of

its authority and its appeal upon the side of civilization, of international understanding and good will. Its articles are sketches of the field of knowledge, designed less to be definitive than to stimulate further study suggested by bibliographical reference. It is, above all, an encyclopaedia of the Twentieth Century, and of the third decade of the Twentieth Century; an encyclopaedia of the time, almost of the day. Rising above the neutrality of timidity, it speaks out clearly and fearlessly on many themes. One may not agree with some of the authors honored by the *Encyclopaedia*, but one must at least respect the publication that gives them this great forum of mankind.

Two examples of this positive quality may be cited. Professor T. H. Morgan of the California Institute of Technology writes the article on "Lamarckism". While presenting quite fairly the views of Lamarckists, Professor Morgan at the same time refutes these views from the standpoint of the greatest living expert in the field of genetics. Similarly in another field, the distinguished statesman, T. G. Masaryk, gives his view of Czechoslovakia, a political instrument largely of his own creation. The tone of such articles, though the subjects are open to controversy, is yet sufficiently judicial to satisfy an inquiring mind. One feels that, although there is probably another side to the picture, at least one side, and probably the most important, has been fairly treated by a real authority.

More controversial than these is the life of Lenin by Trotzky. Here the subject on which people feel more violently perhaps than on any other is presented by an extreme advocate, and the reader infers at least that all is said that can be said in behalf of a great world figure of his time. It has taken courage to open the *Encyclopaedia* to such advocates, and this courage breeds respect.

I have said that the dominant impression of such an excursion as I have taken during the past months is a living in the present world, in the world of this very day. The sense of up-to-dateness in this encyclopaedia is extraordinary. It is conveyed by simultaneous advance toward publication of all the volumes, by the inclusion in every article where statistics are used of the very latest statistics, and of the addition of the latest "stop-press" news up to the very moment of printing to every article dealing with contemporary life. It is further strengthened in fields of social activity by a fuller treatment than I have ever seen of contemporary movements, especially in practical and applied arts. It is carried out in the bibliographies by reference chiefly to the latest books upon the subject, which, containing as they do complete lists of the standard works, are sufficient guide for the average student or more mature reader. Still more modern is the recognition of the latest advance in scientific study, which makes certain aspects of the work, especially in the applied sciences, almost as fascinating as the popular magazines on mechanics. An illustration of this quality was cited in the article on "Twins" with its illustrations, a subject to which no reference was made in the eleventh edition of a few years ago.

Yet, although this fourteenth edition is a mirror of our age, the great past has not been slighted. It is a pleasure to see an old friend restored to its columns, as in the case of Watts-Dunton's article on "Poetry", so much in demand by readers of the art. Macaulay's essay on "Johnson" is still in its classical niche. Such masterly essays as Barker's "His-

tory of the Crusades" are retained in this edition. Especially, it has seemed to this reader, the whole field of Greek civilization in art, sculpture, architecture, literature, politics and other phases, has been described with an authority worthy of the traditional bond between Ancient Greece and modern England. In emphasizing, therefore, the importance of this work as a reference book, probably the most valuable single enterprise in existence for general adult education, this aspect of historical catholicity and solid authority is not forgotten.

It is impressive, for anyone who has tried to edit a book, to attempt to imagine the labor involved in securing many of the articles. The description of the Kellogg Treaty outlawing war comes, for example, from ex-Secretary Kellogg himself. The description of the later work of the League of Nations comes from Lord Robert Cecil. The description of the literature of the Hittites, so recently deciphered, comes from Professor Orzony. Throughout the volume not only are the latest discoveries described, but they are described by the discoverers themselves; and, as I have said, Zanzibar is just as fully treated as Albania. This indeed is something new in encyclopaedias.

Will this modernity soon be outmoded? Time alone can tell. Some motor cars are so well designed that they hold their style for years. The *Britannica*, it seems to me, though up to date, is built along solid and permanent lines. Its standards of good taste are never out of style.

The earlier editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* were like the earlier curriculum of the university, chiefly confined to philosophy, history, and pure science. The fourteenth edition has spread like the curriculum of the university over a much wider range of knowledge. I can imagine some austere colleagues turning away with scorn from the extended space given to the article on carpets and rugs, with its magnificent reproductions in color; yet the modern universities in

their courses in art give ample space to the history of the rug, and the Persian carpet is no less interesting in history than the Greek sculpture. Modern taste, by the way, even in the latter, appears in the volume when the Venus of Cyrene is given preference as a full-page illustration over the Venus of Milo.

But this encyclopaedia goes even further than the arts. It gives extended space to industrialism and to commerce, to banking and to trade. Most of the large business enterprises of the English-speaking world are listed under specific articles, replacing many of the forgotten Scotch worthies whose biographies covered so many columns of the earlier editions of the *Britannica*.

Most significant of all in this development of a standard reference for the whole English-speaking world is the recognition of the United States of America as a world force. It is even more significant in this international encyclopaedia than in one primarily developed for the American public alone. The contemporary social scheme in these states is given a surprising recognition as, for example, in the article "Harlem" by a leading representative of the Negro literary world. American books and newspapers are quoted everywhere. American authorities have written many of the articles. Automobile route-maps of the states under their respective headings indicate the supremacy of the motor car in American transportation. Etchings of the great centers of city life create a vivid impression of the stir and motion of American growth, such as must amaze the European reader. Indeed, there could be no better index of the place now filled by the United States in the mental horizon of Great Britain than this fourteenth edition of the *Britannica*. This recognition extends to the smallest detail. The article on auction bridge, for example, gives equal place to British and to American rules for the latest developments of the game.

In short, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* puts

a girdle around the world, not in forty minutes, as Puck promised to do, or in twenty days, as the Zeppelin did, but in twenty-odd volumes. The twenty-four thousand pages present a vivid, definite sketch of the universe as we know it. They must become one of the chief sources of reference for hundreds of thousands of college and high school students who will consult its pages as a guide book before starting out on their own voyage of discovery.

They will probably not go to it, even with the vast weight of authority that it possesses, as did the readers of earlier generations to the *Britannica* of their day. The fourteenth edition will probably not so much settle questions as stimulate questioning, but this is in accord with the temper of the time, and particularly in accord with the temper of the student of today. Older students may regret the absence in the bibliographies of the standard works of the past. Closer inspection will suggest that the present edition has the substance rather than the appearance of authority, and if this edition has gone further into the vexed questions of our day than any other encyclopaedia thought wise, it will at least remain a more vivid picture of what the people of our time were thinking and saying. What Corbett thinks about architecture, for example, is a prophesy rather than a description, but it is a record of the Twentieth Century and one worth preservation. I think college students will be less likely to crib its pages for themes than they did in the past. I guess that they will think twice before they give as their own opinions some of the judgments in these articles, but that they will be stimulated to more active mental processes by the reading of its pages I have no doubt. In my own field of medieval literature, I am quite content that the article on "Chaucer" should refer in its modern bibliography only to the standard manuals, while sections such as that on "Race" by Fairchild, which are too modern for such manuals, receive a full presentation.

My impressions would be incomplete if I omitted reference to some of the more serious aspects of the *Britannica*. As one would expect with Garvin's editorship, the *Encyclopaedia* stands strongly for peace and good feeling, and particularly for British-American understanding. The British tradition of fair play is given full sway here. The Irish Free State is just as freely treated as Northern Ireland. Leagues, treaties, alliances, armies, navies and wars are all dealt with from a standpoint of statesmanship that is in harmony with current feeling.

What is true of the world of politics is true also, as far as one can see, of the worlds of philosophy and religion. The *Britannica* is neither irreverent nor cynical. It is not a destructive, but a constructive instrument of civilization. One of the best statements of the aim of modern religion that I have ever read is at the end of Marett's article: "The quickening of the will to face life earnestly". Vast, perplexing, infinitely complicated is modern life, and one can no longer see it whole perhaps, but one can look at it wholesomely and steadily. This seems to the writer to be the ideal of the editors of the *Britannica*. This temper of scholarship, of fairness, of undimmed idealism, is a blend much needed in the world of thought. Disillusion and sophistication have had their day and have run their course. The students of the next age are tired of them. The *Britannica* is of the coming rather than of the passing generation. An excursion in its pages is invigorating. It is a visit to the heights.

Of the many mechanical devices adopted by the new edition, I need not speak. They will at once strike the reader of the earlier editions. Greater emphasis upon the casual glance of visual education in general, upon graphs of all kinds, will be noted at once. Less easily perceptible is the equalization of emphasis of an interest on the whole world rather than on the English-speaking world. The recognition of women as readers also is made as never before. Although American women's colleges are not referred to by Cubberley in his discussion of higher education in America, this omission is atoned for by many articles in the fields of primary interest to women. Dr. Josephine Baker's explicit directions on the correct way of bathing a baby seem at first sight strange material for the great *Britannica*, but in the policy of humanizing this is wholly natural and the page will probably be as much read as any other article. The great literature that has arisen in the last few years to make science intelligible to the reading woman will welcome the new *Britannica* as a powerful ally.

In one household at least, the fourteenth edition will replace the eleventh at the very focus of family activity, as an indispensable household aid. It will occupy a bookstand in the smallest room in the house, which is also the busiest. On top of the little stand, the household telephone will give access to the speech of men; while on the shelves below, the *Britannica* will wait to serve our need for the written word, as a great clearing house of civilized intercourse.

## A LETTER FROM ABROAD

by Rebecca West

*Ethel Colburn Mayne's Life of Lady Byron—An apology for a mis-statement—How literary history becomes distorted—The religious mania which did not afflict Henry James—The fifteen years which Arnold Bennett did not spend in Dartmoor Prison—An analysis of the strange psychology of the Byron household—Byron-worship—A meeting with Colette.*

Provence, France, September.

AS I stood on the platform at St. Raphael, waiting for the train to come and take me up to Paris to see Emanie Sachs, I opened my *Continental Daily Mail* and read a paragraph which caught my attention very painfully. It related to the most popular book of the London summer season, which is *The Life of Lady Byron*, by Ethel Colburn Mayne, a distinguished woman of letters (in physique, by the way, the double of Elsie de Wolfe) who is not so well known in America as she ought to be. Ever since the *Yellow Book* she has done excellent work in the way of translation, short stories (she is responsible for one of the best contributions to that collection of mystery stories, *The Omnibus of Crime*, that Payson & Clarke have just brought out), and biography. The present volume is a pendant to her life of Byron, which is generally admitted to be the best yet written. This paragraph did not relate, sad to say, to the conspicuous success and merits of the book. It was such as wrings with sympathy the heart of any fellow author and sends to his lips a prayer that so it may never be with him.

In fact, it was a letter of apology from Miss Mayne, in which she expressed regret for a mis-statement she had made. In *The Life of*

*Lady Byron* she had alleged that Marie (the daughter whom Medora Leigh, herself the child of Byron and his half-sister Augusta, incestuously conceived by her sister's husband) changed her name to Ada, lived in Paris in the constant performance of good works, founded the Ada Leigh Homes for Girls, and ultimately married the Archbishop of Ontario. This had struck me when I read it as a most singular example of how even the weariest river may wind somewhere safe to an archiepiscopal see.

But, alas, it was not true. Suddenly there appeared before Miss Mayne the angry descendants of the aged but still living Ada and the defunct Archbishop, armed with incontrovertible proofs that they were the result not of the confused illicitness of the Byron family but of the ordered legitimacies of various Manchester citizens. The embarrassment this situation has brought on the Archbishop's family is as nothing to the light it throws on the difficulties of the biographer. Miss Mayne is the most scrupulous of writers. It is not conceivable that she should have committed herself to a statement so bizarre, so likely to be untrue, without receiving what purported to be a full verification. In fact, somebody, sometime or other, must have lied.