

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

VOLUME III

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JULY 31, 1926

NUMBER I

Nothing to Read

A PESSIMIST with two much bile secretion has been writing in one of the weeklies of the low state of the literary market. The novelists are all platitudinous, the critics have no regard for æsthetic perfection, the poets are mere whittlers, except for one or two noble incoherents who might be great if they would take good advice, Willa Cather is trivial, Galsworthy is stupid, Booth Tarkington capers for the public, Robert Frost is a rustic—there is no health in us, and even unhealthiness is badly done, in other words, no one has produced a literary masterpiece for twelve months—and hence there is nothing to read.

This everlasting coddling of potential æsthetic genius grows tiresome. A group of the intellectually superfine and overtempered seems to think that readers' brains, printers' ink, and the whole effort and array of writers' work exist only for the hatching of a perfect sonnet or some miracle of literary prose. They would have astounded Pericles (and Plato) by urging that Greece flourished only to give birth to Phidias and Æschylus; they are content to paw over and behind them all contemporary books in the search for something which justifies its existence by conforming to their definition of transcendence. When this is not mere snobbery, it is absurd. We did not need Spengler to tell us that a work of art is strictly conditioned by its time, and that the age is more important, at least for those who live in it, than the by-products which are its functions and parts.

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Therefore while it is impossible to be too exigent if you are defining artistic masterpieces, it is dangerous to be merely æsthetic in a search for the good in contemporary books. The supercilious reader who snuffles about in the ear's production and retires with nose up and tail indignantly high, complaining that he cannot find on perfect bone, is as big a fool as the lowbrow thinks him. Finding no pearl of art he leaves all the rest good only for such swine as the rest of us. Science, history, philosophy, politics, biography—all the indispensable nourishment for the imagination and the intellect, and that fiction, poetry, drama, which, though not great, is the perspective through which we see our time, he ignores because it is not high art. Far from taking all knowledge as his province, he sees only dimly beyond his own special interest, which are prevailingly literary, whereas the modern books he must perforce survey are prevailingly not. He cannot see literature in its eternal aspect as the sum total of human experience so far as it can be put in words, but accepts the sentimental definition of a good book as the precious life blood of an exalted spirit, whereas it may equally be the residuum of a hard-working brain.

June (to be complete) is notoriously one of the dullest and poorest months in the American publishing season, and yet a careful survey of the books published in that month of this year shows at least ten or fifteen well worth anyone's reading. Judged by strict æsthetic criticism there are only two items in this list worth considering for a moment, the last instalment of Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga ("The Silver Spoon") which however temporal in its political and social passage is an impressive record of our times, and two or three of the short stories in De la Mare's "The Connoisseur," one of which, "The Nap," belongs to the literature of great fiction. Yet substitute for the æsthetic viewpoint one broader and more human, and the story changes. For among this

The Cage

By MARTIN ARMSTRONG

MAN, afraid to be alive,
Shut his soul in senses five;
From fields of Uncreated Light
Into the crystal tower of Sight;
And from the roaring Songs of Space
Into the small, flesh-carven place
Of the Ear whose cave impounds
Only small and broken sounds;
And to this narrow sense of Touch
From Strength that held the stars in clutch;
And from the warm ambrosial Spice
Of flowers and fruits of Paradise
To the frail and fitful power
Of Tongue's and Nose's sweet and sour.
And toiling for a sordid wage
There in his self-created Cage
Ah, how safely barred is he
From menace of Eternity.

Murder and Music

By GARNET SMITH

WE have it on the highest Elizabethan authority that the man without music in himself is fit for direst stratagems, and is not to be trusted. While the worthy and puritanic Roger Ascham, tutor of Princess Elizabeth and Latin Secretary for her when Queen, was of the opinion that much music marred men's manners. Now an Italian contemporary, His Most Illustrious and Serene Highness Don Carlo, Prince of Venosa and lord of many other demesnes, approved himself a murderer and a musician, and equally distinguished in either department. What are we to make of him? Roger Ascham, had he lived long enough to hear of what befell, would have wagged his head shrewdly. To be Italian or Italianate signified as who should say spawn of the devil. Galen the physician and Plato, who reduced the arts to their proper limits and practice, were entirely right for their own times and the future. The madness inspired by the Muses may be divine; but the best lot for musicians is to be ravished with delight, to sing on with never a thought of eating and drinking, and so in their forgetfulness die and become noisy grasshoppers. Or, if these polyphonous and multiform Mountebanks will persist in being themselves, good citizens are to anoint them with myrrh, set garlands on their heads, and thrust them out from the gates. But music and murder? Cause and effect? Well, Plato would have found in Don Carlo Gesualdo one who had no right perception of harmonies and rhythms and modes; who felt and expressed joy and sorrow in a manner wholly at variance with law. But again, can a bad man possibly be a good artist? That question gave endless worry to Ruskin. Nowadays, we are like to admit that an individual need not be all of a piece. A man may be fair or foul by turns; may be noble in his art, and yet have base instincts. He may even turn criminal, should the temptation be strong enough.

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It was in 1590, and in Naples, that it all happened. A manuscript chronicle of the time and the official enquiry allow us to reconstruct the tragedy and its antecedents with fulness and accuracy. Don Carlo, by the death of his elder brother, became heir to the title and estates of the house of Gesualdo. He was thirty, unmarried, and delighted in nothing save music. But his position obliged, and he wedded with his first cousin, Donna Maria d'Avalos, already twice a widow at the age of twenty-one. She presents him with an heir and still another baby son, and thereupon, says the chronicle, the enemy of the human race interfered, being "unable to endure the spectacle of such great love and happiness, such uniformity of tastes and desires." There is a certain Fabrizio of the all puissant house of Caraba, third Duke of Andria, known for the handsomest and most accomplished nobleman of the city, courtly and gracious, a very Adonis in feature, and in manner and bearing a Mars. And withal an uncle of the Prince Don Carlo, ceaselessly and vainly importuning one whom he believed to be a chaste Penelope, discovered the secret, and played the tale-bearer. Timely warning is nevertheless given, and my lord Duke counsels prudence and remission. But

CARLO GESUALDO, PRINCE OF VENOSA. By Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine. London: Kegan Paul, 1926.

This Week



- "Three Books on Religion." Reviewed by Rufus M. Jones.
- "Better Writing." Reviewed by Grant C. Knight.
- "Loeb Classics." Reviewed by J. M. Cornford.
- "The Art of Being Ruled." Reviewed by Richard Aldington.
- "Don Juan." Reviewed by Edward Davison.
- "The Cambridge Ancient History." Reviewed by M. Rostovtzeff.
- "Die Rheinpolitik Kaiser Napoleons III." Reviewed by William L. Langer.
- "John Donne." Reviewed by John M. Berdan.
- "The Poems of Lizette Woodworth Reese." Reviewed by Padraic Colum.
- "Superwriting." By Margaret Lynn.

Next Week, or Later

- Suaviter in Modo. By Elmer Davis.
- "Show Boat." Reviewed by Henry Seidel Canby.
- The Bowling Green. By Christopher Morley.

dozen of books are Spengler's "Decline of the West," a philosophical *magnum opus* which, despite its bias of German post-war pessimism, is a definite step forward in the unifying of history by the correlation of all the aspects of an age. There is Durant's readable and often brilliant "Story of Philosophy," as good a compendium as has been made in our

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Donna Maria, reckless, marvels that nature could err in creating a knight with the spirit of a woman, and a woman with the spirit of a valorous knight. Had he not better turn lackey, and withdraw? Idly did the Duke urge that he feared not his own death, but lacked the constancy to endure hers, which surely would follow. Could he be so cruel to her own beauty, thus exposing it to the risk of mouldering away, untimely, in the darkness and silence of the tomb? Nay but, rejoined Donna Maria, or the chronicler supplying speech exactly characteristic of the times, nay, but one moment of his absence was more death-dealing than a thousand deaths which might come through her delights. "If I die with you I shall nevermore be separated from you." He must prove himself faithless or loyal. Either he is base and cowardly, or he obeys her wish and command and he bows humbly in token of submission. "Since you wish to die, I shall die with you; such is your wish, so be it."

So far the chronicle, which is confirmed by the depositions, and romances at most when it tells of the trap laid by Don Carlo. There was no need to give out falsely that he was going a-hunting, and would not return that evening. The chase was other, and quite at hand, in an adjoining apartment of that palace still existing, and known as the San Severs, in the Piazza San Domenico. What ensued? An example of Renaissance "energy;" an orgy of passion and blood-lust, comparable with those that enthralled Shelley and Stendhal, and the Elizabethans before them. Let a reference to the accounts furnished by the maid-servant and the valet, in the present volume, suffice. On the morrow, the bodies of the hapless lovers lay exposed in the hall, and the whole city flocked to the sight. Much ink was shed in the way of lamentation by poets and rhymesters, from Tasso downward. But the fury of the lord Duke Carlo had not been sated with a double crime. Fleeing to Gesualdo for safety, he spies his second child in the cradle. And, bending over it, his jealous eye detects the hated lineaments of the Duke. Up with brat and cradle by silken ropes attached to the four corners of the ceiling. Round and round they span till the babe, breathless, "yielded its innocent soul to God." Which further atrocity did not sleep in the popular ear, and served to heighten vision. Every night the phantom of Donna Maria glided and moaned about the precincts. A generation later, we have a chronicle of divers disasters that had befallen illustrious Neapolitan families. And herein we learn how black misfortune dogged Don Carlo and his line; how it pleased God to destroy, both in possessions and in honor, this princely house descended from the ancient Norman kings. And the palace in Naples, wrecked in the earthquake of 1688, was restored only to gain in sinister repute. In the eighteenth century it harbored a Prince of San Severs who dabbled in science, presumably illicit, since infernal lights were often seen to flash through the windows. Nay, in recent times, a part of the building suddenly collapsed, with loss of life. Behold the working of a fatal curse.



But to return to Don Carlo. Straightway informing the Spanish Viceroy, and advised to get beyond the reach of angry relatives, he had fortified himself in his castle of Gesualdo, cutting down all forests and thickets that might shelter approach. He became frenzied, or so the rumor ran; and used avarice and tyranny upon his vassals. But, presently, matters smoothed themselves out. He was in exile for little more than the three years which Plato assigned as sufficient punishment for the murder of husband or wife. Once again he is wholly preoccupied with music and its charms, and none the less able to marry Donna Eleonora d'Este. But then, to be of the Court of the Estes, and in Ferrara was a joy and a marvel; a foretaste of paradise ever kept in tune by musicians specially appointed, and the largest musical library in the world. Don Carlo could fleet away the time felicitously. Ferrara was a joy and a marvel; a foretaste of paradise for cultured mortals. Profit and delight here blended themselves in due proportion. Could the heart of man desire sweeter discourse on beauty and virtue, fairer occasion for athletic accomplishment, than here offered? Through fragrant gardens and groves, when not engaged in the livesome disport of masks and feasting. And remember that Don Carlo was no mere dilettante whose published music gained the homage that waits upon wealth and posi-

tion. Milton, sending home a chest of choice music, duly included the Prince of Venosa. Gesualdo, the musician, is a figure of importance in musical history; of paramount importance, Mr. Philip Heseltine insists. He holds proud place among the men whose music was the crowning glory of the Renaissance. (Or should one not rather say that his were the times when music was arrogating supreme rank among the arts?) At all events, standing a little aloof from the great tradition which gave England her William Byrd and Italy her Palestrina, through Luca Marenzio, the madrigalist, he joins hands with both. He is of the fine flower of the daringly imaginative, experimental composers. Sacrificing none of the older polyphonous methods, he invested them with wealth of chromaticism and the new harmonic resources derived from it. He has audacious passages that seem to foreshadow the methods of today. Small wonder that, of late, French and German and English theorists are busy with him. Here is somewhat of that realism, impressionism, tone-painting, experiment in sound-for-sound's sake, which nowadays we are supposed to desire and require. But the interested reader should consult Mr. Heseltine's enthusiastic chapter for himself.



Mr. Cecil Gray, dealing with the biography, knows, but fails to emphasize, the distinction between the Renaissance and its period of gradual decay. After 1530, Italy is other than it was. The blighting hand of Spain lies upon it. History henceforth can but record creeping paralysis, social putrefaction. There was, indeed, governmental and moral reform of a sort. The Council of Trent had sat. Outward decorum was observed; hypocrisy reigned. This very crime of Don Carlo bears witness that the times had changed. It lacks the Renaissance virtuosity, the brilliant and economical adaptation of means to an end. The hired *bravi* are clumsy; the gun-shots and sword-thrusts too lavish and ghastly. This work of the shambles is due to the Spanish point of honor. Spanish jealousy prompts, not the Renaissance need of a *bella vendetta*, the need to spoil the triumph of others. In Renaissance days, the brother and father, of the woman, as well as the husband, would have felt constrained to exact penalties. Now the popular sympathy is with the hapless lovers, with Mars and Venus, while "impious assassin" is the politest style used concerning Don Carlo, the outraged Vulcan. These are the times of Vittoria Accoramboni; of the Duchess of Palliano and many another case. Elizabethan dramatists, like Webster and Tourneur, were astounded and fascinated. Could such things be? Horror haunted them like a nightmare: horror only to be rid away by the creation of stage monsters, of ferocious beasts safely to be seen behind the cage-bars of art. Only Shakespeare, and Massinger in some degree, could maintain the large mind. While John Ford—was he not of the true Renaissance, that Renaissance so blind to moral evil as to show almost innocent? Be all which as it may, together with the modern problem of a-morality. Another aspect offers. De Quincey, in his "Murder as a Fine Art," achieved the hard task of prolonged irony. And Mr. Cecil Gray, in a special chapter, performs a clever fantasia after De Quincey's method; plays a dexterous game of grim wit.

And what of Don Carlo himself? Anatole France has sketched him for us. But it is a composite figure of the imagination, even as the Elizabethan dramatists fused various incidents to shape out their hero or heroine. We learn from a chronicle that he kept a dozen young men in readiness to flagellate him thrice a day, for that a horde of demons gave him no peace. But Campanella the philosopher, citing the case, assigns to flagellation the virtue of curing costiveness. Physical explanations are always to hand when souls are plagued. Did conscience prick Don Carlo? We have the evidence of a painting which hangs in the chapel of that monastery he caused to be built, by way of expiation, in Gesualdo. The Redeemer is throned aloft for judgment, and pardons the contrite Prince who humbly kneels in the corner. His maternal uncle, Saint Carlo Borromeo, with an arm flung about him, protects, presents. The Blessed Virgin, the Archangel Michael, Saint Francis and Saint Domenic, the Magdalene and Saint Catherine of Sienna, all with divers gestures supplicate for him, or exhort him to trust the Divine mercy. Moreover, in the center, is the murdered child, happy with an angel on either side. While below, and now hidden by the altar, are—Donna Maria and the

Duke of Andria, burning in eternal flames. One is left with a newer puzzle. So repentant, and so vindictive still?

On Mr. Cecil Gray the portrait of the Prince, in the original or in the reproduction given, makes a disagreeable impression. He discerns the sure signs of perversity and degeneration. That is seeing too clearly, perchance, through the varnish and tarnish of the years. Michelet, altogether ardent to discover character in portraits, should be a warning to us. At any rate, one more method of investigation remains. Mr. Philip Heseltine affords us specimens of the madrigals. And, having heard them by the help of vocal friends, he finds in them the vivid and passionate expression of a strange personality; detects violent contrasts and changes of mood, deeply dramatized emotion, together with much elegance and suavity. Rehearsing them over for oneself with an imaginary choir, one can fairly agree with Mr. Heseltine, and specially note a stressed poignancy. But again one asks whether the musician is not conditioned by his times and his talent rather than by his remorse or his whole character.

The Spiritual Life

RUYSBROECK THE ADMIRABLE. By A. WAUTIER D'AYGALLIERS. Translated by FRED ROTHWELL. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1925. \$5.

HERETICS, SAINTS, AND MARTYRS. By FREDERIC PALMER. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1925. \$2.50.

THE GREAT PARTNERSHIP. By JOHN ARCHIBALD MACCALLUM. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by RUFUS M. JONES
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IT looks at last as though we were on the way toward a real religion of life, a type of religion which could with sincerity be called *spiritual* rather than doctrinal or ecclesiastical. Many preachers have caught the idea and are interpreting it with insight and power, but the hope of its spread and triumph rests more solidly on the written than on the spoken word. Each annual output of books includes a very large number which propagate vitally and impressively this every-day, out-doors type of religion, which is primarily concerned with life and truth. "History," wrote Michelet, "deals with the soul, original thought, fruitful initiative, heroism of action, and creation. It shows that a soul weighs infinitely more than a kingdom, an empire, a state system—sometimes more than the human race itself." Another scholar has said: "The only thing that makes history worth writing is the spectacle of a soul superior to the peril that confronts it." "Tell us of the soul, tell us of the soul," was the cry of the Italian students in the fourteenth century. When will our students insist on hearing something about the vital issues of our own humanity,—something as convincing about the soul as is the theory of atoms about the world of matter?

The first book in my list is a single contribution to the growing stream of constructive mystical literature. If we were to make a list of the four greatest mystics in the history of the Christian Church most of us who are experts in this field would put Ruysbroeck in the tiny list. We should disagree over many names but we should almost certainly agree to include him. He has had great interpreters of his messages but he has seldom received such a scholarly and well-balanced estimate of his position in the long line of spiritual torch bearers as from M. D'Aygalers, nor has he had from anyone a clearer or sounder study of the influences that shaped his life and thought. This book is a masterly piece of work upon a figure in every way worthy of the love and learning here bestowed.

The introductory chapters present the background and prepare the frame for the portrait. There is one on "Society in the Fourteenth Century" which will not arouse in the reader such desire to go back to that century for his social and economic life. Then comes an excellent study of the Church in that century with its struggles and its politics and its problems,—a chapter which gives some of the reasons why such a powerful wave of mysticism swept over Europe during that hundred years. The third chapter deals with deviation from piety in the period under consideration, and this once more leads up to the renaissance of enthusiasm and mysticism. The fourth chapter introduces the hero of the book,—a real hero though he never fought a battle,