

the account of the assassination of Dollfuss, and the abortive Nazi putsch, which Mr. Gunther covered. The stories are not put in only because they are interesting, although they are. But they are fitted in carefully, into the picture of the whole of contemporary Europe, to help answer for the reader questions like: Will there be fascism in France? Will there be war? Mr. Gunther goes slowly on prophecy, but no one can possibly read this book without being infinitely more *en rapport* with the whole outlook for the next period than he was before he read it.

I wish all our own conservatives, or those who think they are, would read the chapters on England. Mr. Gunther knows who is really important in Britain and who merely seems to be.

Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, is certainly one of the ten most important men in England.

The Civil Service is the incorruptible spinal column of England.

The ruling classes employ propaganda far more artful than any dreamed of by Dr. Goebbels. . . . Censorship is by . . . voluntary conspiracy.

He introduces a fascinating list of the real forces and players in the broad arena of British political life, and they include items such as these:

The non-conformist conscience.  
The decline in the birth rate.  
The open forum in Hyde Park.  
Letters to the *Times*.

The formidable severity of English law.  
Ingrained pacifism in the younger men.  
The fantastic number of humanitarian societies.

The high salaries of judges, members of the cabinet, and ambassadors.

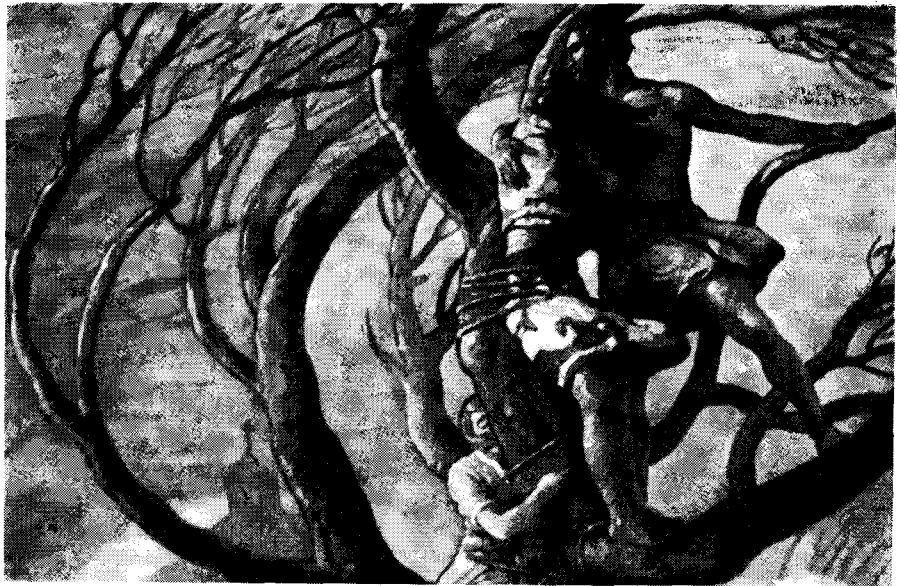
He knows that the late King hung on his study wall the maxim—

Teach me neither to cry for the moon nor over spilt milk.

He remembers that Mr. Baldwin assessed himself, anonymously, after the war, a capital levy, to help retire the public debt. (Page our own champions of Coolidgeism.) And he does not think it at all unimportant that Anthony Eden's two brothers, one a boy of sixteen, were killed in the war.

It is difficult to make a distinction between amusing or juicy gossip and facts of genuine significance. Mr. Gunther is shrewd in his selections, and this, together with the impressiveness of his material, gives the book its quality.

On the whole, the book is remarkably even. The chapters on Hitler and Germany seem to me least satisfactory. The Blob of Ectoplasm is elusive. Despite the prodigious assemblage of detail the character of the movement does not quite emerge. Stalin is exceptionally well done, although I wish Mr. Gunther had avoided the categorical statement: "Give Russia ten years of peace and it will be the most powerful country in the world." Powerful in what sense? Powerful in war, where it will probably eventually be tested? The statement is open to skepticism.



JACKET DESIGN BY N. C. WYETH FOR "THE HURRICANE"

## All Night Narrative

*THE HURRICANE.* By Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

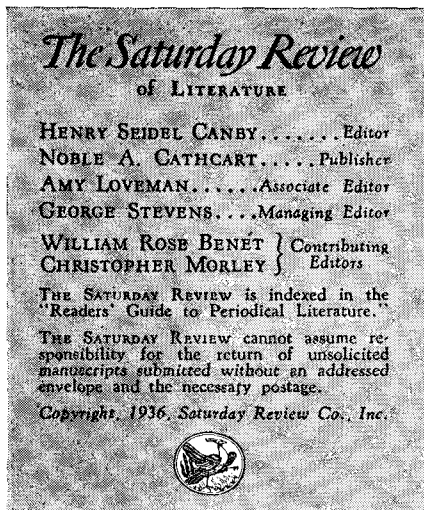
**N**ORDHOFF and Hall have made the South Pacific real to many, from Pitcairn Island to the Great Barrier Reef. They now follow their great saga of the *Bounty* and her men with a story of today, cast as fiction but having all the force and terror of fact. It is told somewhat in the Conrad tradition, an all-night narrative by the grizzled Breton doctor who has been for fifteen years the medical officer of a group of coral islands. It will very likely send some of us back to reread *Typhoon*, but I hope I am not silly enough to suggest comparisons. This story does not percolate through such finely meshed commentary, ironic and philosophized, as was Conrad's habit. But its clear simplicity is its peculiar merit, and I rather think it takes its place alongside the great storm-pieces. There will hardly be a reader, if he should chance to encounter the book on a night of wind, who will not anxiously wish to consult a barometer.

I have the strongest resentment, when reading a tale of this kind, against any sort of spoilsport information beforehand. Even the hints publishers give by pictorial jacket and come-on copy are, for me, too much. To anyone who still retains any freshness of curiosity, any childlike delight and savor of being told a story, it is damnable to be tipped off in advance. All that the reader needs (or wishes) to know is given by the authors in a few preliminary words. Their story concerns the Tuamotu Group, known to geographers as the Low (or Dangerous)

Archipelago. It is a string of coral reefs and islets scattered over a thousand miles of ocean, east of Tahiti, south of the Marquesas. They are under the French flag; inhabited by a few thousand Polynesians; mere fringes of coral rock, enclosing wide lagoons; sparsely sprinkled with soil and coconut trees; never more than a few hundred yards wide. They rise only a few feet above sea-level. At Manukura, the island of this tale, the vast lagoon seems "to stretch away to infinity, to be metamorphosed at last into sound: a faint unceasing thunder, as though the stream of Time itself were pouring over the brink of an abyss." This is the sound of the great Pacific rollers shattering on the coral reefs, and gives the prescient reader his necessary twinge of foreboding.

And into the lagoon of Manukura, in the sunset of a calm day, comes the little schooner *Katopua*, these islands' only regular communication among themselves and with the outside world. She carries, as passenger, a young French official—perhaps a new Administrator, we are not told—who expresses his horror at the solitude and desolation of the place. But Dr. Kersaint, who knows these atolls well and has found in them a sense of reality the European world never gave, tells him that Manukura, now only a mass of tumbled coral slabs and patches of scrub, was a few years ago the seat of administration for the archipelago, beautiful and gaily inhabited.

What happened to Manukura, and how the tragic impasse of civil discipline pitted against an island outlaw hero was solved by the ocean herself, is Dr. Kersaint's narrative. I shall not forestall you with more than that. The story is wise and kind, witty in character-drawing, horrible in power, superbly told.



## Books and the Radio

WE return to the dismal prophecy, made recently, that it is only a question of time before the radio puts an end to good reading, and specifically to the novel. In our opinion this is nonsense, and for several good reasons.

What the radio actually is doing, is to give back to the human voice the telling of stories and the narrating of events. This is where story-telling, pure and simple, belongs. It was always a face-to-face or mouth-to-ear affair, until writing and afterward print interfered. The best story-telling was, and is, oral. The best tales are told tales, designed for an immediate effect, where the voice readily does what written style accomplishes with such difficulty, and is so sure to be ineffective unless a master hand moulds the diction. The finest written narratives are with few exceptions based upon traditional sources which were originally, in every instance, oral. Indeed story-telling as such would never have taken to writing if the teller could have been sure of a large enough audience within range of his voice. He would never have taken the trouble to write his stories down.

Once the writer began to write and the printer began to circulate his writing through areas far beyond his personal contacts, a new art began, the art of fiction, the art of reflective or interpretative poetry, the art of sophisticated drama. But print and writing took simple story-telling along in their baggage. The bard and minstrel disappeared, leaving only the anecdotist and wisecracker, the degenerates of a great tradition. Popular stories were told in print. Now the radio is giving back story-telling to the story tellers, who trust to the oldest medium of communication. Their art is still imperfect, for the radio waves cannot yet be trusted to carry the human voice in all its intonations, can seldom be trusted with the feminine voice; and facial expression, that first-aid of the story teller, is still omitted from the equation. Nevertheless, the radio, far from interfering

with literature, has restored to popular narrative its proper medium, and given to the voice of the story teller the one facility it lacked—carrying power beyond the range of hearing unaided by the machine.

But to suppose that the book is to be supplanted by the radio is to assume that we are going to be content with story-telling. A novel is not story-telling, though it begins by being a story. A novel is a highly complex erection of the intellect in which are woven strands of emotion and of thinking which only the leisure of writing can devise. A good novel can be read aloud successfully only under congenial circumstances. Its complicated material needs both eye and ear for quick understanding. But the eye usually runs faster than the ear, hence heard fiction drags for the habitual reader, even when it is too speedy for the hearing. No radio audience will ever be patient with a real novel read chapter by chapter over the air. A fully developed novel (and the same is true of history, of drama, of most poetry) is enriched from those powers to think which are the privilege of a writer who does not have to recite his work. He has time to build up the events of his story-telling into three dimensions. It is quite impossible to read such a book over the radio, because the hearer is perfectly sure to want it faster than it can be read, or slower—more usually slower. In a radio delivery there is for the hearer no turning back the pages, no allowance for misunderstanding, for the author no leisure to play about the subject, no refinement of phrase without the risk of puzzling the audience. The radio will do increasingly what books have tried to do in default of the living voice of the story teller. It will occupy the marginal areas into which books entered because the old race of bards and minstrels and fireside tale tellers no longer could function in an expanded world. It will narrow the field of the books, but it cannot possibly take the place of the written word.

Indeed, the radio may do a great deal to restore good reading, which suffers now more from diffusion than from lack of material. It is a commonplace that we all read too much print. It is not so obvious, yet equally true, that the mere amount of reading in sight distracts the mind from good reading. For good reading always requires some effort. It may be a heightening of the emotions, it may be an exercise of the mind, it may be merely concentration. Whatever is required, the books, newspapers, magazines, among which we move like men in a snow storm of print, distract us from doing it. Why did our educated ancestors get so much from the Greek and Roman classics? Because they had to work for what they got. Why do we retain so little from most of our reading? Because so much of it is come-easy-go-easy, thinned to the last dilution or thin by nature. By a Gresham's law of literature such debased

currency invariably drives out the more valuable coin.

In all probability the radio—pocket, auto, and library table—will eventually take over much, though by no means all, so-called light fiction of the rental-library variety, leaving the better books a freer field to attract good readers. Many Westerns, many boy-and-girl stories, many detective stories, most sermons on economics and politics, most books that comment on current events, most popular science, all simple lyric and narrative poetry, will find a happy home on the radio.

What would be left would be real books. The radio can talk about them, but not give them. They must be written—and read.

## Dividends from a Poet

Robert Frost, who has been appointed Charles Eliot Norton Lecturer in Harvard, has for ten years been Professor of Literature at Amherst, where he has exercised and will continue to exercise a deep influence. This is a signal instance of how the unremunerative profession of poetry can be made to yield a living wage for the poet and at the same time pay dividends to education from the rich capital of the poet's mind. For as we understand the terms of Mr. Frost's appointments, he is engaged not as a routine teacher of literature, but as a poet and critic who, without prejudice to his creative activities, has something definite to contribute to students of literature. His presence in an institution designed for teaching and research is in itself a reminder that literature is not only an affair of words, but of men. This is the proper way in which to establish true relationships between the scholar and the creator in the humanities.

## Ten Years Ago

In The Saturday Review for February 6, 1926, Theodore M. Purdy, Jr. reviewed "A Warning to the Curious, and Other Ghost Stories" by M. R. James and recommended the volume for its "particularly horrifying, and therefore admirable" contents. He pointed out that at that time the "very special cult writing and reading this type of work" was stronger in England than America. He added that if Mr. James did not "always produce an effect so completely frightening as Blackwood, nor so hauntingly mysterious as Machen," he excelled both "in his directness and grip on reality."

## Today

Basil Davenport writes in his article in this issue: "Dr. M. R. James . . . has relaxed from scholarship by writing a greater number of consistently first-rate ghost stories than anyone else."