

jester, a good lover, a good hater, and an artist.

All these elements of Peacock's genius may be found in his relation with the poet Shelley. Shelley admired him for his scholarship and his wit, and liked him for other reasons. His strong sense acted on Shelley like a tonic. It was Peacock who prescribed "three mutton chops, well peppered" in substitution for a diet of tea, bread and butter, and "a sort of spurious lemonade, made of some powder in a box." Shelley took the prescription, and its success was "obvious and immediate." He took Peacock's prescription for other ills than malnutrition; it would have been well for him if he could have taken them oftener. When Peacock made Scythrop—him of the doleful countenance—the hero of his "Nightmare Abbey," a glowing, passionate young man who began with schemes to reform the universe and ended on the brink of suicide because he could not marry two young women at once (and so neither would have him), Shelley was delighted by the joke, and provided the book with a motto out of Ben Jonson. It is doubtful if he would have taken so intimate a joke at any other hand. When he left England, his best letters were written to Peacock. Many years after his death, Peacock sent to *Fraser's Magazine* a long review of Hogg's "Life" and Trelawny's "Recollections." The importance of these "Memoirs of Shelley" is recognized. They throw, as we should expect, a dry light upon the obscure places of Shelley's life. But though the light is dry it is not cold.

To readers unacquainted with Peacock I would recommend that they should begin with the "Memoirs"; and I venture to tempt them with an extract, which is so characteristic that I do not apologize for its length.

... Shelley came in, with my hat in his hand. He said, "Mary tells me, you do not believe that I have had a visit from Williams." I said, "I told her there were some improbabilities in the narration." He said, "You know William of Tremadoc?" I said, "I do." He said, "It was he who was here to-day. He came to tell me of a plot laid by my father and uncle, to entrap me and lock me up. He was in great haste, and could not stop a minute, and I walked with him to Egham." I said, "What hat did you wear?" He said, "This, to be sure." I said, "I wish you would put it on." He put it on, and it went over his face. I said, "You could not have walked to Egham in that hat." He said, "I snatched it up hastily and perhaps I kept it in my hand. I certainly walked with William to Egham, and he told me what I have said. You are very sceptical." I said, "If you are certain of what you say, my scepticism cannot affect your certainty." He said, "It is very hard on a man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of truth, who has made great sacrifices and incurred great sufferings for it, to be treated as a visionary. If I do not know that I saw William, how do I know that I see you?" I said, "An idea may have the force of a sensation; but the oftener a sensation is repeated, the greater is the probability of its origin in reality. You saw me yesterday, and will see me to-morrow." He said, "I can see William to-morrow if I please. He told me he was stopping at the Turk's Head Coffee-house, in the Strand, and should be there two days. I want to convince you that I am not under a delusion. Will you walk with me to London to-morrow, to see him?" I said, "I would most willingly do so." The next morning after an early breakfast we set off on our walk to London. We had got half way down Egham Hill, when he suddenly turned round, and said to me, "I do not think we shall find William at the Turk's Head." I said, "Neither do I."

The simplest elements of Peacock's satire are to be seen in this story, in which a situation rich in absurdity is drawn with the faintest possible strokes, and is the more telling for this economy. A man without satirical humor might have judged it his duty to admit that Shelley sometimes imagined things; but he could not have had Peacock's pleasure in the incongruities of the scene—the inconvenient hat, the early and inglorious termination of the gallant journey. The mere perception of fraud in absurdity does not issue in satire, unless it is brightened by a gust of temper. A certain intolerance and impatience are necessary to satire; but its quality depends on the satirist's emotional state. The peculiar mild pungency of Peacock's satire is due to its freedom from real bitterness. It is an irascible old man that looks at us from the photograph of Peacock taken in his later years. "God bless my soul, Sir," exclaimed the Reverend Dr. Folliott, bursting into the breakfast room at Crotchet Castle, "I am out of all patience with this march of mind." And so he was; but his impatience did not interfere with his fundamental, his really imperturbable good humor; it did not spoil his breakfast.

Peacock was a realist and a Tory. He believed in custom and tradition. He disliked the diffusion of education, the growth of democracy, the march

of mind. He believed—or liked to pretend that he believed—that our ancestors "saw true men, when we see false knaves. They saw Milton, and we see Mr. Sachut." Like Dr. Johnson, he held that a man who is not in earnest about his dinner should be suspected of inaccuracy in other matters. Unlike Dr. Johnson, he believed in the efficacy of old wine, judiciously and traditionally accommodated to the progress of a good dinner. "The current of opinion sets in favor of Hock: but I am for Madeira; I do not fancy Hock till I have laid a substratum of Maderia." "He believed in Greek as 'the alpha and omega of all knowledge,' the only key to the temple of the Muses—the Greek of Sophocles's choruses, to be mastered 'constructively, mythologically, and metrically.'"

These are tenets which might well supply an entertaining writer; but they would not keep him sweet for a century. The secret of Peacock is not in his whimsies and crotchets, nor in his sturdy politics, nor even in his wit and humor; it lies in his love of beauty, and his love of beauty is romantic. Perhaps, indeed, Realism and Toryism produce their finest effects in literature when they are in some degree irrationalized by a poet's frenzy, a saving grace of moonshine. We may think of Dr. Johnson, who wished to have seen the Great Wall of China ("I am serious, sir!"), and did visit the Hebrides in search of what we should call Romance. Peacock, like Johnson, was a poet, whose inspiration did not flow readily in the channels of versification. He wrote a good deal of verse in his youth, but little of it is remembered or memorable—though the novels are embellished with some rare Bacchanalian songs. But he is always poetical and romantic in his treatment of mountain scenery, and of romantic youth and maidens, and of Greek poetry. He places his puppets in a romantic situation, for the express purpose, as it seems, of making them and it ridiculous. He succeeds; but in the moment of success a spirit of contradiction comes to his rescue, and turns absurdity to beauty. So the topsy-turvy morality of "Maid Marian" is saved from burlesque by its chivalry and the half-light of the forest; and the satire of "The Misfortunes of Elphin," for all that its objects are greed, sloth, lust, and drunkenness, is conducted, like "Twelfth Night" and the "Birds" of Aristophanes, in the region of pure comic poetry.

This story, as its admirers know, is the quintessence of Peacock and his highest artistic achievement. It contains the Falstaffian figure of Seithenyn, the incompetent guardian of that ancient breakwater, the ruin of which caused the inundation of Gwaod, obliterated a principality, and reduced its Prince to a fisherman, but did little disservice to the criminal, who made his escape in an empty wine-barrel and lived to empty many more. Being unburdened with a conscience, Seithenyn retains his magnificent power of potation and ratiocination, which must secure his acquittal in any poetic court; and provides a background against which the more generous virtues of his juniors and betters shine the more conspicuous. They stand out, also, against a superb natural background of sea and mountain; and the exercise of their youthful virtues is painted in pellucid prose. Peacock's descriptive powers, here used with a master's economy, enable him to sketch a scene with surpassing vividness. There are few passages in English literature which equal for pictorial effect the catastrophe of "Elphin," when at the height of the tempest the neglected rampart is severed, the walls collapse, and the sea rushes in on the bewildered banqueters. Drunk or sober, they are revealed by the lightning and the flaring beacon—the fuddled warden and his retainers, his lovely daughter, the enamored prince, the frenzied bard. The innocents, being in a condition to walk, make good their escape along the rampart. The fate of the drunkards is left obscure; but we are allowed to suppose them engulfed, and a delightful surprise is prepared for a later chapter, when the identity of the chief culprit is discovered.

Beside witchcraft of this quality, the mundane prose of Peacock's ordinary manner has a coarser flavor. But even his least romantic symposia, from which the clash of the elements and the primitive passions is excluded, deserve degustation for their wit and polish. It is a dry wine, but well matured; and there are no dregs.

A Fighting Reconciler

"MY DEAR CORNELIA." By STUART P. SHERMAN. Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press. 1924. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SIDNEY COX.

MR. SHERMAN reconciles in himself many and strong conflicting interests and desires. And that equips him for the unending fight to reconcile the conflicting interests and desires of our world. Always a manly moralist, he is becoming more of an artist. Still so clear and crisp as to exclude important delicate nuances of reality, his thought becomes less arrogantly obtuse to the confusing colored lights of antic revery. His short-necked, heavy-shouldered intellectuality is perceptibly relaxed beneath the warm, caressing arm of emotional realization. And as he grows more gracious and inclusive he does not at all relinquish the uniquely powerful faith that exalts him to the doughty champion of patient, furnished, uncompromising thought.

At odds with both the theorists who speak of progress as if the millenium were just ahead, and the disheartened who speak of consciousness and conscience as aggravations of the curse, Mr. Sherman has always proclaimed both private and social usefulness in concentrating all our human resources on making the best of life. But in early essays like those on Butler and in certain comments on contemporaries he has been derisive and defiant in his proclamation. It has seemed that his intellectual directness and the defined purpose of his inquiries were rendering him oblivious to subtle incongruities not allowed for in the framing of his problems. It has seemed that in his confidence in the utility of summoning all our human resources he was indignantly rejecting the resources of disgust, rebellion and disillusionment.

But in "My Dear Cornelia," Mr. Sherman is no longer sharply definite, like his former adversary, Mr. H. L. Mencken. When Mr. Sherman seems to take his stand in too clear opposition, it is because he sees the truth he emphasizes is in disfavor and the truth involved in the position he attacks is so obvious it requires no disentanglement. His intense love of clarity will always, at intervals, be inflicting twinges on the very subtle.

Surely, though, it is more admirable to be a fighting reconciler than a so consummate reconciler that all desire for action is swallowed up in the questionable victory of mystic death. Mr. Sherman will not resign the struggle in order to achieve immediate annihilating union with the universal mystery. His own words in the specially imaginative and appropriately indefinite "Book Five: Approaching Religion and Other Grave Matters" indicate how he reconciles religion and realism: "I half suspect that God Himself admires most those who 'surrender' to Him only with their last breath." He manfully welcomes responsibility in "the indistinguished mixture of life" and disdains the "beatific mood which—will ensure you against the pain and bitterness of reality."

Yet probably few mystics care more than Mr. Sherman for the unnamable, the essential, the spiritual. And one way of stating his whole effort is: the reconciliation of a bold confronting of concrete necessity in economic, and fleshly, and all sorts of circumstances with a steady and unrelaxing grasp of the inseparable ideal qualities.

Such a beating of swords against each other that at last ploughshares are welded, such a collision of spears as bends both back into pruning hooks, such a violent reconciliation makes Mr. Sherman's present power as a writer. Erudition is reconciled with everydayness, racy idiom with courtly elegance. Gaiety is harmonized with earnestness. Severe sincerity is fused with humorous, ironic but not sarcastic, tolerance.

And a book of moral criticism dealing with marriage, education, careers for women, prohibition, politics, and religion is achieved in which the reader finds, in vivid scenes, distinct, interesting personalities, especially the author, struggling to make the best of difficult and dangerous relationships. The reader is not offered conclusions, he is invited to see what he can do in similar perplexed, ironic situations.

In fact, the book of discussions, "My Dear Cornelia," is more imaginative and less didactic than many a noteworthy novel. And it is more philosophical than many a solemn treatise. Such reconciliation of opposites by means of joining issue is creative criticism.

When Fancy Runs Riot

THE MYSTERIES OF ANN. By ALICE BROWN. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

IN passing for the moment from the ranks of the New England annalists to that of the writers of mystery stories, Miss Brown has retained enough of the setting of her earlier tales and of her characterization of the New England *genre* to lend to her yarn more substance than most of its kind can boast. Here again are the spare, repressed spinsters of her "Meadow Grass" and "Tiverton Tales," the inarticulate and matter-of-fact young lovers, the prying and gossip of the narrow village community. Here is the pathos of the starved emotional life of lowly New England spinsterhood reflected in the sudden orgy of sensationalism into which the reading of detective stories plunges her heroine, and in the unexpected poetry of Ann's vicarious discovery of the power of love. But here, too, are satire and a jesting humor playing through the medium of an ingenious plot, and making of it something more than a merely clever story.

However, the plot is what interests in "The Mysteries of Ann," or, if not the plot, at least the skill with which its rather extravagant framework is manipulated. Miss Brown has achieved what seems well nigh impossible in these days of rapidly multiplying mystery tales,—an original idea carried out along novel lines. Granting the initial implausibility of Ann's fatuous absorption in the crime of her own imagining, an absorption so complete as to render her impervious to any conception of the serious consequences which her words may entail, the narrative advances logically and convincingly. We have no intention of spoiling the story for its readers by recounting its incident; suffice it to say that its complications develop from the sudden passion for mystery stories which drives Ann to outline to her friends a situation in which she herself and the unlovable cousin from whom she may be expected to inherit, figure, and which is unexpectedly realized. There is some adroitly veiled raillery at the stock figures and situations of mystery fiction, an occasional few pages of burlesque, humor not unmixed with pathos in the character drawing, and enough of suspense in the tale itself to hold the interest to the end of the story. It is good light reading.

In a Historic Setting

DRUMS. By JAMES BOYD. New York: Charles Scribners Sons. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by AYMAR EMBURY II

DRUMS is an epic with the American Revolution as its background, but a novel of character in a historic setting rather than a costume romance. Its characters are not be-wigged and ruffled lay figures, but people who might have gone through the great war instead of the revolution, who might be living side by side with us today; and although the pictures of the period are real and stirring it does not make them physically unreal, or show them as governed by impulses or logic different from our own; they are as alive, as vivid, as moving as any character in a novel of modern life.

Although the story as told is that of Johnny Fraser, it is in a broad sense universal; it is the story of a common man of all time, who stands helpless before the vast slow rolling tide of bitterness and hatred engendered by the greed and stupidity of those few men who have power over the nations; and when war flares out at last he is dragged by a pressure in the very air, reluctant, into a conflict whose causes are too remote for his comprehension, and in which he sees only waste, cruelty, and the disruption of the common kindly ties of life.

In a novel of this sort, with little incident and no plot, the characters must be clearly visualized and presented in correct perspective if interest is to be sustained. This the author has done; and when it is realized that among the fourteen characters so distinctly drawn that we would recognize them if we were to meet them on the street, there is no villain and only two or three people we dislike, the author's great ability as a draftsman of character is apparent.

Much research went into making this book so

accurate historically that the most meticulous antiquarian will find no error in the geography, in the customs and manners depicted, or in the record of events, but this labor is not apparent on the surface; no parade of knowledge breaks the continuity of the story, no attempt is made to create illusion by filling the foreground with pictures of the past; but when one of the characters acts or speaks, we are aware that he is immersed in the atmosphere of his own time. So subtly is this done that the attention is never distracted from the character; it is he that is in focus and not the background against which he is seen.

Nor has Mr. Boyd thought it necessary to flavor his style with affected quaintness of phrase or to pepper it with archaisms. The occasional letters which he quotes are, it is true, written in the stilted and formal manner used by our ancestors in even intimate personal correspondence; but in reporting the words of his characters he has not used the bombastic form which was not used by them in common speech. The story is told in direct and tranquil English prose.

"Drums" is a first novel; but it does not show promise, it shows possession. Possession of ability to write English prose as it should be written; possession of knowledge of character drawing and of how to tell a story; and above all, possession of divine discontent with the imperfect, and the patience to rectify it.



Illustration from "The Story of Wilbur the Hat," by Hendrik Van Loon (Boni & Liveright)

A Modern-Day Saint

MY NAME IS LEGION. By CHARLES MORGAN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS KRONENBERGER.

IN this first novel Mr. Charles Morgan has chosen an extremely difficult subject. He has elected to write of a modern day saint, a woman performing the saint's equivalent of miracles and composed almost wholly of the spirit. Against the figure of this woman he has opposed a world of tempted and carnal people; and his story illustrates the reciprocal action of each on the other.

Irma Pennell's mother died in child-birth, hating the world, and having determined that her daughter should be protected from the life of the flesh. As the girl grew up, she came to have a wonderful power—first manifested when she warmed a frozen bird in her hands so that on being set down, it hopped away—of the fatidical and the miraculous; but it was a destructive and malevolent power born of her mother's hate. A dying woman shrank from her, from the look in her eyes a society woman went mad, under her spell a girl committed suicide, and the girl's fiancé, a rake, fell dead beneath her stare. And at last Irma's own deep peace was broken in upon also. It was not until Will Drake, who loved her, strove to remold her power, to direct it toward beneficent rather than destructive ends, that Irma was saved and her peace regained.

To me the difficulties of "My Name Is Legion" seem almost insurmountable, and for that reason it appears right to pass upon the book a kind of special judgment. To be completely successful, it

would require almost impossible fusion of its realistic and supernatural elements. Obviously, it is unfair to dismiss Mr. Morgan's portrait of Irma as lacking in flesh and blood, when his prime intention is to create her in terms of the spiritual. But in a world where we are unlikely to meet a single example of her kind, Irma could be at best a *tour de force*. And in Irma I cannot find a woman who, whether or not she is possible in life, is credible in art. Because I cannot achieve with her even forced contacts, to me she is unreal and essentially uninteresting. I cannot believe that such a person casts a palpable shadow.

Yet, although she is meant to govern and impregnate the book, her own failure to exist does not quite make it a "Hamlet" without a prince. If not wholly original—for there have been other novels about such "saints"—it is unusual enough, almost I might say alien and unlikely enough, to keep one absorbed. It seems so very far away that it gathers a mystic atmosphere. The opening chapters have particularly this atmosphere of strangeness and superstitious dread; they remind you of Hardy. There is the terrifying Christmas party which ends with the death of Urden Clare; there is the unreal, but unforgettable, scene in Mrs. Pennell's bedroom. About these there hangs something of shadow and eerie light.

Finally, as a stylist Mr. Morgan can be said to have arrived. Like Thomas Beer, for instance, he seeks the strong and imaginative word; but in contrast to Beer's telescoping, Mr. Morgan—inferior only in his lack of compression—drops words like flashing stones that fall beneath a tide of tremendous rhythms. His method creates atmospheres that pervade the book. A little later these words may presumably accomplish more substantial and memorable things, which "My Name Is Legion" foreshadows, but does not do.

The Stop of Blood

MARTHA. By Percy Marks. New York: The Century Company. 1925.

Reviewed by BERNARD DE VOTO

Author of "The Crooked Mile"

TO the popularity of "The Plastic Age" two elements contributed in about equal measure. The book was a study of adolescence in a college setting, so honest that it stirred up a fervid discussion of its accuracy. That was enough to assure it the attention of one large audience. But it employed a method that bordered on the sensational, and this method brought it a different and even larger audience. In "Martha" Mr. Marks, casting in his lot with the second, is sojourning in Hollywood.

Only on the assumption of such a choice, deliberately made, is it possible to understand "Martha." It has a theme sufficiently mature. It is the story of a half-breed girl who feels that she is entitled to be received as a white. From the time her mother, a squaw, points out her white father, she will have nothing to do with the Indians of the reservation. At the age of eight, Martha goes to live with the Armstrongs, a minister and his wife, who educate her, foster her beauty and intelligence, and all unknowingly add to her fierce longing to be white. She marries Dan McLeod, a cowboy much her inferior—but white. When this first step toward acceptance proves disastrous, she divorces him and supports herself in the village of Covelo by dressmaking. She is liked and tolerated, she is allowed to sing in the church, she is even received as an equal by one or two of the less parochial women of the town. But that is all: between her and her desire is the full stop of her blood.

The gap seems likely to be bridged when Wally Gardner, the most substantial man in the valley, comes a-courting. The women of Covelo immediately accept her. Restrained by her memories of McLeod's brutishness, she puts off the marriage with Wally—too long. One Frank Cross, who has a slight but forgiven strain of Indian blood, appears, and captivates her. She breaks with Wally, has a *liaison* with Frank, and finally quarrels with him when he refuses to marry her. Forced by the valley's attitude into refuge among the Indians, she bears a child which dies. A short struggle follows to maintain herself among the whites, but she is beaten. Another child sends her back to the Indians for good. She degenerates into a fat, dirty, and contented squaw. When her daughter