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The Saturday Review of Literature

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

VOLUME I — NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 1925 — NUMBER 23

1925

DATES have their mysteries even as men do, and indeed because of them. Who guessed on the eve of 1809 that it was to be an Annus Mirabilis in literary history? What herald-ing was there of 1564, of 1667, of 1798, of 1848, and the lurid 1890s? Is it likely that freshmen will have to memorize 1925?

Why is one decade vivid and energetic and crea-tive, and another stale and weary and common-place? Can a man be born out of his time and fail because of it? Can a time be lacking in men to make use of it? The current of belief runs strongly just now toward environment. Instead of Fate, Genius, God, we look to Climate, Economic Condi-tions, Natural Selection, Health, and Education as great first causes. "In glands we trust" is the new motto.

A Lord Byron flourishing in 1925 is an impossi-bility. The peer of genius, with a face like a Greek god, whose grandiose lines rolled upon waves of emotion through the western world, causing men to think differently, feel differently, dress differently; the poet who could companion himself only with Napoleon and the Alps; the thunderer whose pres-ence made even the cynical Stendhal tremble when he met him in La Scala at Milan!—we will not have such men now, and if they begin to expand, we crush them. Mrs. Leigh Hunt, with precocious realism, said that his picture looked like a schoolboy who had been offered a bun without raisins. His last biographer, Roger Boutet de Monvel, accuses his nobility of being a parvenu, awkward in good so-ciety and never sure of himself. Literary criticism now agrees that he blustered. And yet his "de-lusion of greatness" raised the temperature of a gen-eration!

A Lord Byron, to be born in 1925, is by no means improbable. The sense of personal greatness, which the statesmen of the last war, Wilson excepted, so evidently lacked, flows like energy in and out of humanity on inexplicable tides. It does not depend upon the psychology of the multitude. A Charles Dickens would have a success at this moment which would make his Victorian triumphs fade. Germany would rise to a Goethe. Napoleon has only to come again. This generation is as ready as any other to play Follow the Leader.

The difficulty is that creative energy itself is dif-ferent. Megalomania has lodged in second-class [illegible] and one hears chiefly of Napoleons of [illegible]ation and captains of industry who improve [illegible]cal processes. Few men and women of [illegible]ass intellectual ability and first-rate spiritual magnitude feel the compulsion to be great.

When one considers the havoc in civilization made by would-be greatness, one is tempted to be thank-ful. The cock-a-mighties in literature have been more devastating than the ignorant. But if the Byronic afflatus leads to absurdity, the pinched little-ness which inspires the Middle Western novel or the disillusion of Shavianism or that tragedy of the commonplace which is the theme of so much drama and fiction are themselves only passing phases of the human spirit. We dispose of all the heroes—Cleopatra a political minx, Charlemagne a dull bar-barian, Joan of Arc a neurotic, Shakespeare an in-spired thief of brains, Tennyson a *vox praeterea nihil*—and then, in 1925, a child is born——

[illegible] of course, will not help him, even if [illegible] born at the moment (if this is [illegible] away [illegible] it begins to be possible once more to look at the heavens and say "that is my star," to look at the earth and say as did those earlier fools of genius, "there is my destiny," would make a difference. Environment he will use as Napoleon used armies. Economic conditions he will not depend upon quite so much as we who did not look behind the stock market. Glands he will have, or get what he needs of them. And long after 1925 another Carlyle will write an-other "Heroes and Hero Worship" to prove that it is great men who make history; and then, when the crop of great men fails once more, some later scholar will demolish neo-Carlyle and prove that it was all glands and environment!

But if 1925 is to give birth to a literary hero, there will still be some years before his consciousness becomes more than lacteal. That is fortunate, since it is hard to see much sense or illusion or delusion of greatness abroad at this moment. The fashionable illusion now is of Importance, a very different thing, with different effects, and a habit of inflating the second-rate while genius shrinks to unimportance. And perhaps the root of the whole matter is that in some vigorous ages the baptism, as in France's "Penguin Island" goes on the wrong heads, and every one prospers but the truly great. Some critic, born in 1925, may be able to say more because he will have seen more. There are two certainties in his-tory—change and recurrence.

Midwinter

By JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

BLACK frost; owls hoot in the dark;
No wind; not a leaf falls.
I hear death creeping
Somewhere beyond these walls.

Books glimmer about the room;
Backs draped in golden shawls.
There is no reason I should find my doom;
Death calls.

What is death like to look upon?
A tall grey horse with a shadow slanting
Heavily over his back?

Or a beggarwoman panting,
Eyes fixed; lips haggard and drawn;
Fingers fumbling at a sack?

This Week

Derennes's "Life of the Bat." Reviewed by *William Beebe*

Ellis's "Impressions and Comments." Reviewed by *Allan Monkhouse.*

Merrill's "American Geology." Reviewed by *T. C. Chamberlin.*

"Andrew's American Revolution." Reviewed by *James T. Adams.*

"Sard Harker." By *Christopher Ward.*

The Bowling Green. *By Christopher Morley*

Next Week, and Later

The Poetry of the Brontes. By *Chauncey B. Tinker*

Abbott's "Conflicts with Oblivion." Reviewed by *Gamaliel Bradford.*

Published by Time Incorporated,
Publishers of TIME,
The Weekly News-Magazine

Lyrical Mr. George Moore

By JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

THE Pure Poetry* collected with a preface by Mr. George Moore, beautifully made by the Nonesuch Press, came to me entirely unexpected in the morning's mail. I had seen no advance notices of such an anthology; my surprise was complete and my speculation aroused. What I had to do that morning I forget, but I put it aside and at once read what Mr. Moore called The Thesis. I read it rapidly, with an increasing pleas-ure, and, before I explored among the actual poems, I sat a long while lost in thought. The truth was I hadn't suspected Mr. Moore of such an interest: it had never occurred to me that, as a child, he could have impassionately begged his mother and then his father to permit him to read to them the Shelley of "The Sensitive Plant."

His mother, it would appear, was mildly touched, but his father proved less amenable, substituting, for little George's consideration, "Queen Mab," and then persuading his son of the great merits of Cole-ridge. "Father," George cries, "how beautiful! But——"

This, as I have already admitted, I was unpre-pared for. However, the astonishment soon sub-sided before the realization that the particular thesis of, where Mr. Moore was concerned, the poems in-cluded was extremely able; it seemed to me that what it said was so. Poetry, it proceeded, was di-luted, lost, by thought; thought shifted, changed its forms and convictions; it was not valid beyond very short reaches of time: pure poetry was the poetry of things. And, in support of this, the lyrics of Shake-speare were mentioned. Happy example! And, dwelling upon it, I had that reassuring feeling of recognition, the result of a perfect accord between a paragraph and its reader. It caught up, reiterated, convictions of my own.

Still indifferent to my mail, to what I should have done, I tried to find if Mr. Moore's thesis would include all the poems which for a long while, thirty years, perhaps, had been a part of my being, and it became clear to me that it would. The poetry I infinitely preferred was almost wholly pastoral; a perfect example was "The Scholar Gipsy." There was no end to the deep delight I had from it—the far view of Oxford, the shining weirs, the soft-falling snow at dusk, . . . yes, that, for me, was perfection. Yet, in the poem, something had hap-pened to the actual physical facts: the pictures were part of a sustained mood, they had been woven into a beauty of suggestion, of significance, totally lack-ing in the natural scene.

I had walked through many snow storms at dusk, and I had been damned wet and uncomfortable; I had been by shining water at magical moments of the day, and swarms of infernal gnats had made me unsupportably miserable. And then, at other times, before views of only moderate charm, I had been saturated with the transcendent magic held for me by "The Scholar Gipsy." Mr. Moore, where I was concerned, was right—the poetry of things was in essence pure poetry. But what, in the name of God, was it poets did with things? I didn't, I didn't quite, know; and Mr. Moore, in his Thesis, had just failed to make it entirely plain to me.

If I had been asked that question at, say, a small and ingratiating dinner, at precisely the right mo-ment in the progress of the champagne, by precisely the right individual, I could have answered [illegible]

*PURE POETRY. By GEORGE MOORE. London: [illegible] Press. [illegible]

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convincingly . . . to her: But no[illegible]id, to myself. I should have said th[illegible]ok its beauty, for poetry, in its associa[illegible] long struggles and hopes of man; tha[illegible] around the Dower House, in Pennsylva[illegible] beautiful for the purposes of pure poetry through two centuries of constant tilling; and that the small tangled wild of the Welsh Mountains, rising beyond the profound serenity of the Chester Valley, was not the material of fine poetry at all.

Mr. Moore added that what, now, was needed was not a more instructed poetry, but an innocency of vision; and again, of course, he was right; and again the secret, the magic, evaded its definition. Innocency of vision was the property of, equally, Wordsworth and Blake and Shakespeare; all had such an invaluable poetic quality, such a fixed quality, in common. But what, after all, was it, and how there was that great trio one?

The poem by Walter de la Mare beginning "'Come,' says old Shellover," is as simple as "Where the bee sucks"; it is as innocent; but what, really, I meant by this I had searched for a thousand times and in vain. Was, in addition to the spirit, a simple and perfect verse form innocent? Would the spirit, in a variety of immaculate conception, create the just form in the fibre of the spirit? I wonder. Mr. Moore admitted that, as he grew older, his taste in art purified. Did it, then, grow more innocent?

I had written a great many words, through a not inconsiderable period of years, and not, I may at least say, thoughtlessly; but as they multiplied I was not increasingly impressed by their power to explain the few things that it was important to understand. Not long back it began to look as though a new school of science, a new cold informed attack, would explain the essence, the springs, of poetry; the old vague sentimental symbols were to be all swept away; poetry, too, would be related to the actual, the ponderable, body, to the health, really; but that ambitious, and disturbing, development had not arrived.

Magic, it appeared, was magic still; and, as I wrote that line, I reflected that Miss McLeary, when she came to setting my disintegrating writing into type, would point out to me that, in such a short paper, I had repeated the word magic too often. It, and it only, in all the places where it occurred was what I meant. But what, altogether, it meant . . . however, this was morning and not a dinner, there was no champagne, no lovely individual to be charmed by adroit definitions.

What, perhaps, a little unsettled me was the confidence and precision of Mr. Moore's opinions; and, specially, the beautiful tenacity of his memory. That report of himself as a child, failing to be moved by the lady's curl in "Cristobel," but almost overcome by the high dancing of one last red leaf! And Walter de la Mare's memory, too—there is a dialogue between Walter de la Mare and Mr. Moore in The Thesis—that, as well, was amazing; even more spectacular, it may be, in the instant reciting of a not unelaborate poem which couldn't have been at the forefront of his consciousness.

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In the third division of his introduction, removing from the dining-room to the drawing-room—where it occurred to Mr. Moore the coffee might be served—he left the immediate subject of pure poetry to dwell momentarily on Arnold Bennett and the painters, Velasquez and Franz Hals. From Hals he progressed to Courbet and from Courbet, inevitably, to Manet and springtime, his own as well as the May of the Impressionists. And that brought me back to my own youth and memories—my present convictions were their inadequate souvenirs—of poetry.

The poetry of things as opposed to a poetry of thought; yes—I believed firmly in the former; and I reflected that, a few evenings before, at Whitemarsh Hall, when Mr. Newton had read a paper on Shelley, I had early found the same difficulty with Shelley that I now experienced with the strictly contemporary young men—they were diluted by thought, reasonable deductions, plans for either the rehabilitation or destruction of society. I thought again, there: what would happen to poets, and to the writers of imaginative prose, if the world were definitely saved and made the dwelling of a flawless justice.

I recognized, of course, that everyone, practically, would sacrifice all the poets and novelists ever heard of in the interest of his own security; but I was [illegible]ng, undoubtedly selfishly, as a writer. I was [illegible]ghly accustomed to writing, I couldn't think of anything else to do; I needed subjects and subjects needed agony and suspense and longing, [illegible]jects positively demanded injustice; and, re[illegible] Shelley in his Utopian mood, I first lost the [illegible] of pure poetry and then put him aside with th[illegible] ization that at best, or worst, it could not co[illegible].

By the poetry of things Mr. Moore meant the poetry of man's relationship to the actual world of his brief activities, the surrounding colored air, the trees and hills and barnyards; but he meant, too, a fairy world, the world of "Come unto these yellow sands." The plane of actuality and the plane of fancy, both unrelated to social or moral causes and beliefs as ends. As ends! That, at last, signified something to me: Savonarola, for example, was superb poetry regarded objectively, but any identification with his purpose in Florence, any commitment to the impersonal validity of his sheer hope, would be poetic suicide.

It came to this, that pure poetry called up deep memories, recognitions, racially old instincts and infinitely repeated habits. A thing done and done and done again became not only an inherited memory but beautiful; this, I mean, happened to the simple acts, the things, of living—ploughing the April fields, the flowers that were the sign of April, the scarlet leaves that were the mark of autumn. They were bound into man's existence; and when he saw them, in fact or in poetry, his heart was stirred; here, once more, was the freshness of his youth, the reflective melancholy of his particular inescapable October.

To Mr. H. L. Mencken, for illustration, love was a ridiculous comedy; that was the attitude of a highly civilized critical mind; but to poetry, to pure poetry, love was not ridiculous; it was the oldest of all forces, and it touched men, when they were young, with a divine delusion; that beauty and the sense of power in their hearts was at once mythical and real; but to them, to poetry, it was a miraculous fact.

The poetry itself, Mr. George Moore's selections, was almost, for me, faultless. And what instantly engaged me was the difference in its spirit from the spirit of "Come Hither," the anthology of English poetry made so lately by Walter de la Mare. There was, speaking very broadly, an air of autumn about "Come Hither" and of spring in this "Pure Poetry." I may have felt that because of the entrancing lines to Mistress Isabel Pennell with which Mr. Moore opens his selections:

> Isabel,
> Reflaring rosabel,
> The fragrant caramel,
> The ruddy rosary,
> The sovereign rosemary,
> The pretty strawberry,
> The columbine, the nepte,
> The ieloffer well set,
> The proper violet.

A poem all fragrance and delicate color. And then Shakespeare:

> Perfume for a lady's chamber;
> Golden quoifs and stomachers,
> For my lads to give their dears;

And:

> Hark, hark!
> Bow-wow.
> The watch-dogs bark:
> Bow-wow.
> Hark, hark! I hear
> The strain of strutting chanticleer,
> Cry, cock-a-diddle dow.

The purest and most magical of poetry.

Thomas Campion follows, with ". . . youthful revels, masks, and courtly sights." And another Thomas, Dekker, sweeps forward with, "Haymakers, rakers, reapers and mowers." The Summer-Queen, in eglantine bowers, is dressed with musk-rose, and yellow flowers are strewed over the village green. The charm of "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn" I almost entirely missed, even with its golden vial to hold two crystal tears; and there was, for me, a great deal of Blake. No, after "The Fawn" my sharpest interest faded—the earlier poems, the older, were the best . . . a tranquil loveliness imperceptibly drifting away.

Yet John Clare—I was in total ignorance of him—captured a vanishing beauty in Clock-a-Clay:

> In the cowslip pips I lie,
> Hidden from the buzzing fly,
> While green grass beneath me lies,
> Pearled with dew like fishes' eyes,
> Here I lie, a clock-a-clay,
> Waiting for the time of day.

Yes, and the "Mariana" of Lord Tennyson be[illegible] where [illegible] the aga[illegible] Helen[illegible] [illegible] po[illegible] to be clear to me, were at one time so[illegible]ch in the common throat; songs about s[illegible] and the weather and other homely comm[illegible]. In the Eighteenth Century they became polished, or was it only polite; and later they grew into theories, experiments; and later again—or they had that sound to me—epileptic. But there was none of that in Mr. Moore's collection; a tall slender grey book with a fine page, a warm fine paper; and in it was a great deal that life had lost, principally a rude animal physical simplicity, immensely grateful to experience, in memory and in poetry, in a very different and intricate, an unhappily hastened, time.

On Flittermice

THE LIFE OF THE BAT. By CHARLES DERENNES. New York: Harper & Bros. 1924. $4.

Reviewed by WILLIAM BEEBE.

TO the author and to the reviewer and to the reader there flashes out, now and then, a spark like a beam of ultra violet light in a darkened laboratory: a title, an introductory sentence, a paragraph, a short story, more rarely a whole volume. One of each of these comes to mind—a quartet of unforgetables: "The Troublesomeness of Bulbuls," "It was late afternoon in the Stone Age," "The Jest of the Gods," and "A White Night."

Charles Derennes has written a small volume which Louise Collier Willcox has translated as "The Life of the Bat." I had read not more than half a dozen pages when I looked up anxiously at my shelf of shelves, and to my relief saw that a small space existed between "Here are Ladies" and "The Sea and the Jungle." Someone had removed one of my Immortals and into this crevice Derennes's book should go. He would not be lonely, for farther down the row were two more Frenchmen, Levick's "Penguins" and Claudel's "Connaissance de l'Est."

"The Life of the Bat" is no book for the reviewer. The only satisfactory way to present it would be to run it complete as a serial. I have the advantage of many readers in coming to the volume predisposed in favor of bats. Like all other things in life their mystery is a potent lure. I have tried to learn of the intimate life of vampires and have succeeded only in the most obvious externals. Derennes here makes clear much of the strange existence of the common house bat, and in language which compels a second and a third reading. The vivid similes distract with delight, and the fertile and apt diction of Miss Willcox leavens the core [illegible] actual facts. I find that my successive readings ar[illegible] dominated in turn by emotions literary, etymological and chiropteristic.

The author explains on page five that "By din[illegible] of watching the ways of the stars, I noticed the existence of bats." The volume is the result of year[illegible] of patient watching, sometimes taming the little flittermice, sometimes listening to their chatter beneath the eaves. Mothers and babies were gently and kindly cared for and their ways accurately and charmingly transcribed.

> Like a nurse in a well-to-do family, enveloped in a cape so that she may nurse the baby in its folds without displaying her charms too much, so Noctu, really seated in the corner of the manger, dispensed the nourishment fr[illegible] her own body, under the shelter of her great, stret[illegible] hand, which she folded like a veil over the touc[illegible] sacred mystery.

Now and then the scientist relaxes and tu[illegible] folk lore.

> Old Gebracque lived on the road by the cemetery five hundred metres north of the garden of Old Pile. All the neighbors pretended that she was descended from a family of witches, and I would have taken great care not to contradict this because I was only fifteen years old and she was hardly ninety, and had begun to believe in her own stories from the very moment when, without laughing at them or denying them, I amused myself by discussing them critically with her. Thus I came to know that the sky in full daylight was full of enormous bats, invisible because they were the color of the sky and the sun, and it wa[illegible] they who employed witches to go at night and join the[illegible] kind in such and such sinister places. As for the bats that the eyes of ordinary men saw at twilight, they were nothing but the diminished shadows of the real bats used by witches, which were the color of the sun and sky.

Fabre never did anything so impersonal as this, nor Thoreau so [illegible], nor Hud[illegible] [illegible]. It is a thoro[illegible] [illegible] book [illegible] out to Charles [illegible] and to L[illegible] cox.

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