

## The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be received later.

### Biography

SAVONAROLA. By PIERO MISCIATELLI. Appleton. 1930. \$3.

Since Villari's great biography of Savonarola researchers have been busy correcting the lines of his portrait. When Villari wrote Alexander VI, the great Borgia pope was still bearing on his broad shoulders most of the sins of the Renaissance. He was a convenient scapegoat, that passionate, bull-necked, crafty Spaniard, for nineteenth century historians who found it necessary to blame upon someone the disasters that came thronging upon Italy. And the great Florentine scholar, sincere patriot and sincere liberal, saw him as the spider at the center of the web which finally enmeshed his hero, the great friar who was the prophet, so Villari thought, of secular and ecclesiastical freedom. The Borgia pope had so much to answer for that one more crime could scarcely darken his reputation, and he made an ideal villain for dramatic contrast with the unworldly monk. Nowadays we see history in less violent contrasts; we see Savonarola as a medieval reactionary neither liking nor understanding the new world into which he was thrust, and Alexander as a genuinely tolerant, secular minded administrator, reluctantly forced to sanction a course of action which he regarded as stupid and unpolitic. Recently published studies do much to support this view and of these studies Signor Misciatelli's new biography of Savonarola makes the fullest use.

Signor Misciatelli has made the fullest use also of what other materials modern scholarship has assembled on his project, and particularly, as is only proper, of the writings of Savonarola himself. Frequent and tactfully chosen quotation of his prayers, sermons, and pamphlets is, indeed, the most illuminating part of the book, which, on the whole, is balanced, readable, and scholarly. Perhaps it is its very balance and the objectivity which relies so heavily upon quotation of the sources, which constitutes its weakness. The scholarship is all there, the knowledge of the subject and the period, but it remains unfused by any decisive power of interpretation. To refuse to decide between the two accounts of Lorenzo the Magnificent's death bed, and not even to warn the reader against the almost certainly apocryphal story of his refusal to restore to Florence its liberty (how could Savonarola have made or the dying Lorenzo have complied with so ridiculous a demand?)—all this is a kind of scholarly caution which verges on timidity. Such caution defeats itself. If the biographer wishes to abandon Villari's interpretation of Savonarola and his times he must achieve a new one. It is not enough to present the new facts side by side with the old. For the general reader Signor Misciatelli's biography will hardly provide the same absorbing interest as Villari's vivid classic, and the special student will still turn to more precisely documented monographs and above all to the sources themselves. The English edition of Signor Misciatelli's book has a useful index, but lacks bibliography or footnotes. Its translation preserves little of the charm of the author's Italian style.

### Drama

WHILE THE RIVER FLOWS. By Marcel Pays. Translated by Babette and Glenn Hughes. Appleton.

THE WORKS OF CONGREVE. Edited by F. W. Bateson. Minton, Balch. \$3.

SIR ARTHUR PINERO'S PLAYS AND PLAYERS. By Hamilton Fyfe. Macmillan. \$5.

### Economics

AMERICAN ECONOMIC LIFE. By Rexford Guy Tugwell, Thomas Munro, and Roy E. Stryker. Third edition. Harcourt, Brace.

THE PERSONAL RELATION IN INDUSTRY. By John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Boni. 50 cents.

INVESTMENT TRUSTS GONE WRONG. By John T. Flynn. New Republic. \$1.

### Fiction

THE STRANGLER FIG. By JOHN STEPHEN STRANGE. The Crime Club (Doubleday, Doran). 1930. \$1.

Mr. Strange has effected the difficult feat of concocting a mystery story that is novel in setting, fresh in incident, and capable of springing surprises up to the very last chapter. It plays on an island off the coast of Florida where a house party is in progress at the same palatial home from which the owner seven years before had walked out on the terrace to vanish completely from the knowledge of his friends.

Here in the isolation of the tropical countryside ensues a succession of murders in the unraveling of which one Mr. Bolivar Brown takes the lead, and the perpetrator of which is not discovered until Mr. Strange has nicely befuddled his readers with ingenious possibilities. The tale is well written, its exotic background lending it a brooding atmosphere, its situations are well contrived, and its events nearly articulated. Even the jaded reader of detective stories will find in this book a yarn to whet his interest.

THE TAVERN OF FOLLY. By MARY DICKERSON DONAHEY. Doubleday, Doran. 1930. \$2.

TOMBOY. By DINAH STEVENS. Appleton. 1930. \$2.

These are two books of the type which one first lays aside as not falling into a really first-class group, and then picks up again, admitting that they will be read with some interest and entertainment. "The Tavern of Folly" is a mystery story contrived out of the conventional theme of a haunted house, the daring solution of its mystery by its new occupants, and several love stories which are by-products of this solution. It is well written and there are good village characters and one or two really original elements, such as the ghost's turning out to be a young novelist pursuing his trade; but one feels that the plot has been put together with a yard-stick.

"Tomboy" is a somewhat cheaply made book, but in its lively style and flow of humorous dialogue is unaffectedly amusing. It aims at a serious thread of story in leading a more-than-madcap heroine through a period of uncontrolled wildness into a serious ambition which "brings her around" both to finding her own feet and to a love story. Both ends are too extreme, but one must admit Jane's power to amuse and entertain as she chatters her way through the book, and also the worth of the idea that a girl with a mechanical (or any unusual) genius and a magnetic personality can be turned from wildness into usefulness and content if the right adjustments are sympathetically found.

HER FATHER'S HOUSE. By HILDA VAUGHAN. Harpers. 1930. \$2.50.

Miss Vaughan has created a living and admirable character in Eleanor Tretower, daughter of a dissipated Welsh gentleman by a wife who sprang from narrowly Puritan peasantry, and presently went back to them with her child. But Eleanor never forgot her father's house, and came to love it—and, with reservations, her father—on stolen visits; till at last after countless vicissitudes she came back to it as its owner. Unfortunately, the excellence of Eleanor Tretower has to be displayed by her reaction to adversity, and none of her adversity is spared to the reader. We see her in the horrible narrowness of her uncle's home in Wales, in the overworked misery of a London maid servant and a London laborer's wife; and finally in a terrible pilgrimage, on foot, back to Wales. By way of compensation for this dolorous history there is only—besides Eleanor—the picture of Welsh life in hall and cottage in the 'nineties; well done, but nothing to give the reader any special delight. Some of us feel that it is supererogatory to read about the misery of the virtuous poor in a season when we can see it, and even be it.

THE CASE OF ANNE BICKERTON. By S. FOWLER WRIGHT. A. & C. Boni. 1930. \$2.

Mr. Fowler Wright is a most fecund writer of somewhat propagandist fantasy. His "Deluge" was a striking novel, which has been followed by others none of which attained to quite its pace or its plausibility. Now we have, from his facile pen, a detective story pure and simple, a specimen of a *genus* flourishing widely in our day. We cannot say that he has written a first-rater of its kind. The cat is out of the bag about fifty pages from the end of the story, the guilty party has not entered the story therefore. The latter end of the book has merely the interest of a "reprieve" which we are, after all, positive will come in time, for the benefit of the falsely accused. In our opinion Mr. Fowler Wright transgresses the rules of detective story writing in this yarn, though the first part of the book promises something, and the solution has probability. Others may not agree. The account of the trial, the rendering of testimony, is interesting and shows the author's thorough acquaintance, not an uncritical one, with the law courts of England.

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by George D. Lyman



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**Points of View**

**Coleridge and Metre**

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
Sir:

Although it is fully a month since H. L. Binsse's article on Gerard Manley Hopkins appeared, I should like to enter a protest. Mr. Binsse said: "The Romantics had broken the obviously sterile eighteenth century conventions in diction; they had not even considered breaking its more subtly sterile conventions in metre and line structure." And later, "Only when sound and sense happened, more often through luck than good management, to coincide, as in Gray's 'Elegy,' in Keats's 'Odes,' in a little of Wordsworth and Shelley, in much light verse, had really fine poetry resulted." And he defines Hopkins's "new rhythm" as being "in theory, nothing more than this; a line should always be considered as made up of any given number of equal units, each unit containing one stressed syllable together with another stressed syllable or as many unstressed syllables as one may choose, rather than a fixed number. The second stressed syllable can be replaced by a rest, as in music."

Of the inaccuracies in expression in these passages I forbear to speak, as they are not germane to my purpose. I merely protest his statement about the Romantics. For in his Preface to "Christabel" Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: "I have only to add, that the metre of the 'Christabel' is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition, in the nature of the imagery or passion." As a matter of fact, the syllables vary from four to twelve. I am not suggesting that the rhythm of "Christabel" is the rhythm of "The Testament of Beauty" or of Hopkins's poetry; I suggest that the opening lines of the poem fit rather well Mr. Binsse's definition of the new rhythm, and that Coleridge was consciously breaking the conventions of eighteenth century metre.

'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,  
And the owls have awakened the crowing  
cock;

Tu—whit!—Tu—whoo!  
And hark, again! the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew.

I would remind him also that Blake said, among many other things, "Bring out number, weight, and measure in a year of dearth," and "Damn braces, bless relaxes." And he was not, in these proverbs, forgetting meters.

ELIZABETH NITCHEE.

Goucher College.

**Charles Cotton, Poet**

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
Sir:

It would be a service to all who delight in poetry to take up arms in behalf of Charles Cotton, known to most of us merely as the friend of Izaak Walton and the author of the second part of "The Compleat Angler." I hesitate to apply "greatness" carelessly, but I am convinced that in spots his lyric genius touched the spheres of Shakespeare and Keats. His poems, as far as I know, are few, and a great many of them are love poems of the prevailing mode. But such lyrics as his "Evening Quatrains," "Winter," "An Invitation to Phyllis," and a half dozen others are as good as anything written in English. It is the essence of "pure poetry," according to Mr. George Moore's definition.

I hesitate to quote small pieces, because part of the magic of the stuff lies in the beauty that sings along above the actual words—the same sort of magic that Shakespeare gives his lyrics. But would you expect this from a seventeenth century bard?

The shadows now so long do grow,  
That brambles like tall cedars show,  
Mole-hills seem mountains, and the ant  
Appears a monstrous elephant.

A very little, little flock  
Shades thrice the ground that it would  
stock;  
Whilst the small stripling following  
them  
Appears a mighty Polypheme.

Or this, of Winter's "life-guard of Mountaineers":

Their partisans are fine carved glass,  
Fringed with the morning's spangled  
grass;  
And pendant by their brawny thighs  
Hang scimitars of burnished ice.

Or this:

There's water in a grot hard by,  
To quench thee, when with dalliance  
dry,  
Sweet, as the milk of sand-red cow,  
Brighter than Cynthia's silver bow,  
Cold, as the goddess' self e'er was,  
And clearer than thy looking glass.

Or this, from his "Ode on Death":

Or, if some one with sacrilegious hand  
Would persecute us after Death,  
His want of power shall his will withstand,  
And he shall only lose his breath;  
For all that he by that shall gain,  
Will be dishonor for his pain,  
And all the clutter he can keep  
Will only serve to rock us whilst we sound-  
ly sleep.

GERALD W. BRACE.

Cambridge, Mass.

**Confessionario**

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
Sir:

In his admirable review of the "Builders of the Bay Colony" in your issue of August 16, Mr. Randolph G. Adams touches the question of Latin American publications. Though the Spanish may have neglected to print the Bible for the natives in those years before the Bay Psalm Book was planned, they did publish a Confessionario in double columns of Aztec and Spanish in the City of Mexico, I believe, as early as 1634. In exploring the first editions of European voyages and discoveries recently for the earliest records of the American Indian, I came upon this volume:

CONFESIONARIO

MAYOR, Y MENOR

en lengua Mexicana

Y platicas contra las Supresticiones de idolatria que el dia de oyan quedado a los Naturales desta Nueva España, e instruccion de los Santos Sacramentos &

AL ILLUSTRISSIMO SEÑOR D.  
FRANCISCO MANSO ZUÑICA,  
Arcoobispo de Mexico.

NEUAMENTE COMPUESTO POR  
el Bachillor don Bartholome de Alva.  
AÑO DE 1634

Impresso en Mexico, por Francisco Salgado  
Impressor del Secreto del Santo Officio.

If someone had done a like service for the Mayans, we should have that much sought key to records of a lost world.

NELLIE BARNES.

University of Kansas.

**Joycian Interpretation**

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
Sir:

That was an engaging piece about James Joyce in the *S. R. of L.* of August 2, whether taken as a serious review or as an amplified blurb. But some of us get out of breath before reaching the Joycian heights, to which Gilbert would lead us, and have to stop.

While panting by the roadside, vagrant fancies come a-whispering.

One: Does a really worthwhile writer—one who has something to say and knows how to say it—need so much explaining and "interpreting" as Joyce seems to? One can get a lot out of Shakespeare and Goethe and Dante and Homer and Isaiah and the Book of Job (to name no others) by just reading them.

Two: Given the diligence of Gilbert, and the time for it, couldn't one work up a plausible dissertation on the hypothesis that Joyce, instead of a "prophet," is either a hoaxer on a grand scale or a bit cracked?

Three: Couldn't another dissertation—or two—be worked up on the double-jointed hypothesis that Joyce's verbal tricks derive from the nonsense rhymes, counting-out rituals, and other word-twisting diversions of childhood, and the substance of his "epics" from the wall scribbles of public comfort stations?

Four: Didn't a Dodgson chap, masquerading as Lewis Carroll, do some entertaining word-manufacturing, without getting himself written up as a "prophet"?

BERNARD J. MULLANEY.

Chicago.