

Soglow and Thurber Disarm Our Critic

THE LITTLE KING. By Otto Soglow. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1933. \$2.

MY LIFE AND HARD TIMES. By James Thurber. New York: Harper & Bros. 1933. \$1.95.

Reviewed by GILBERT SELDES

FOR "The Little King," by O. Soglow, what is wanted is not a review but a sales talk. If it comes to that, I am just as willing to beat the bass drum for "My Life and Hard Times," by James Thurber. But Mr. Thurber, in addition to his great talents as an artist, has great talents as a writer, and about writing I know something and can possibly be critical. Mr. Soglow, without a text, disarms me completely.

I found myself once in a British colony on New Year's Eve, in a large dining-room filled with Under-Secretaries, homesick Londoners, and loyal local J. P.'s and merchant princes; what I was doing in that room and how I got there neither I nor the companions who had deserted me were ever able to find out. But it is on record that some time after midnight, I rose, with a glass in my hand, and, to the dismay of the assembled Britons, cried out: "Gentlemen, the King!"

When the first of Mr. Soglow's Little King series appeared, it was my impression that he was toasting the same gentleman, but as time went on, I began to understand that no constitutional monarch could enjoy life so much and no absolute monarch could be so harried and chivied as this one. Even in the great bad old days before the war, no king had a chamberlain so bulged and curved to attend him and to sniff flowers too tall to be reached by the royal nose; no king was so attended by outriders and men in busbies for the function of unveiling a statue of himself; no king, however defeated by nature in the matter of height, had a low shelf cut into the bar and a low rail to rest his feet on; no king had a superdreadnought at his disposal when he wanted to go aquaplaning, and no king dived for pennies in tropic waters.

On the other hand no record of Wilhelm or Nicholas suggests that a monarch in our time broods over a snub from a janitor or has to punch a time-clock or has the royal special attached to an interminable train of freight cars or, in crown and dressing-gown, has to let the portcullis fall to take in the morning milk, which is, however, Grade A; and none, I am sure, ever tried so valiantly and unsuccessfully, to thumb a ride.

I am forced to believe that the "Little King" is not an historical record but a work of the imagination, and I am happy to say that as he appears in book form, the King's life is more rounded, more full of intellectual and passionate interest

than it sometimes has appeared to be. We find that, with a sly look on his face, the King proceeds through concealed doors, traps, and circular stairways to the entertainment of a cutie whom, with rather dubious taste, he has installed in the palace; we find a hotel clerk inquiring whether a certain young lady is the King's wife; but on the side of morality, we also discover the King as an indulgent, cradle-rocking father. This does not, however, make him indulgent to little boys who stick out their tongues at him, because he sticks his own back. In brief, the King is a complete man, husband, father, and lover, sportsman,

diplomat and friend of the people. Gentlemen, I give you The King. (Via any bookstore, \$2.)

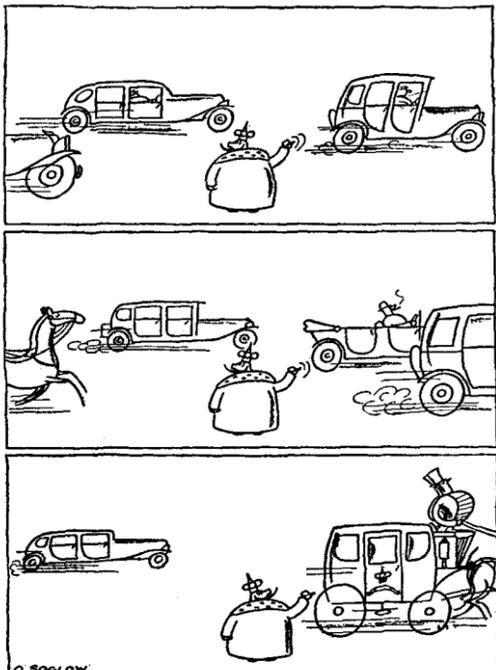
It was Mr. Soglow's first distinction that he was not trying to imitate any of the other artists of *The New Yorker*, and it is Mr. Thurber's distinction that he did not try to imitate any of its writers. It has long been said of *The New Yorker* that except for the subtle-minded gentleman who writes its first page (Mr. E. B. White) it has developed no writers to compare with the artists who have flourished in its pages. Mr. Thurber, who first came to fame as an artist—a brilliant one, with a great gift of draughtsmanship and an upsetting outlook on life—has steadily marched forward as a writer, and in "My Life and Hard Times" has created one of the funniest books I have ever read. Remembering what was done to the reputation of the late Ring Lardner, I suppose it will only be a matter of weeks before we are informed that Mr. Thurber is a great social reformer or a profound psychoanalyst and is not funny; but I will still stick to my guns. In fact, I think Mr. Thurber intended to be funny because he says in one of his chapters of biography that "it makes a better recitation . . . than it does a piece of writing"—that is "the night the bed fell on my father." Perhaps Mr. Thurber misled me, but I found that nearly all the other chapters would also make good recitations. This is only guesswork, because I have never heard a good comic recitation in my life.

Mr. Thurber gives you the impression in his preface that he is one of those unfortunate people who always push the one door that doesn't open when they are trying to get out of a building and attempt to buy soda checks in the one place where you pay at the counter. He himself, he says, has "accomplished nothing of excellence except a remarkable and, to some of my friends, unaccountable expertness in hitting empty ginger-ale bottles with small rocks at a distance of thirty paces." He is in error. He has accomplished something which very few writers do. He has a style combining accuracy, liveliness, and quiet—qualities which do not often go together. He has a sense of the wildly incredible things that happen to human beings who think all the time that they are acting with the greatest prudence and common sense. It is this sense that his people imagine themselves to be moving steadily and reasonably under their own motivations when they are really being as near lunatic as you can be, unconfined,

that makes Mr. Thurber an exceptionally interesting writer. (You will find the same things in his drawings. His women and his dogs may both seem perplexed, but in whatever fantastic situation they find themselves, they know they are the only reasonable people present—you can tell it by their eyes.)

I think this is the reason that no matter how the extravagant situations pile up, you always have the feeling that Mr. Thurber is telling the literal truth. At least he gets you in the state of complete belief and then, when in the midst of his personal memoirs of ghosts and servants and dogs, he tells the story of universal panic on the day the dam did not break in Columbus, the dates and the names of streets and all the palpable data are not needed except for the sake of the record. Mr. Thurber has you hypnotized. You believe that people really are like the people he writes about and draws. And looking back on it you see no reason to change your mind. They are.

Gilbert Seldes is the author of "The Seven Lively Arts."



AN EPISODE FROM "THE LITTLE KING"

A Graphic Story of the Real Revolution

RABBLE IN ARMS. By Kenneth Roberts. New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

PRIOR to the present volume, Kenneth Roberts published "Arundel" and "The Lively Lady," drawing encomia thereby from other good writers. The former book dealt with the American Northern Army in the American Revolution, up to the attack on Quebec at the end of 1775, the latter with the privateers of the War of 1812. Now comes "Rabble in Arms," which is a sequel to "Arundel," and in which the characters of Steven and Phoebe Nason, Cap Huff and Marie de Sabrevois reappear. Incidentally, Richard Nason, of "The Lively Lady," was the son of Steven and Phoebe. But to return to "Rabble in Arms," here is a tale of the Northern Army's struggle for two years after the defeat at Quebec. It leads up to the second battle of Saratoga. Several quotations at the beginning of the book are indicative of its historical veracity. General Burgoyne is quoted as referring to the American troops as "A rabble in arms, flushed with success and insolence." And the author of "The Life and Times of Washington" is excerpted from to this effect:

Benedict Arnold's country and the world owe him more than they will ever liquidate; and his defection can never obliterate the solid services and the ample abuse which preceded it.

For this novel is an exposition of those solid services to his country rendered by Benedict Arnold before his defection, the story of a great leader and of a man who surmounted almost insuperable obstacles. It throws a new light upon American history. I should indeed recommend "Arundel" and "Rabble in Arms" as required reading supplementary to all teaching of American history in high schools and colleges. Mr. Roberts founds his fiction upon skilled research and weighed authority. He knows the period and the men, and recreates the country and the atmosphere of the time with unusual vividness. "Rabble in Arms" is nearly nine hundred pages long, but I first read it avidly, and—at that—in galleys (surely the hardest way to read a book!)—for it gave me the sensation of living actually in the time of which it treated. The two brothers, Peter and Nathaniel Merrill, carried me immediately into the compelling narrative, and when I came to the battle of Valcour Island and later to the exile of Captain Merrill, Doc Means, and Verriuel among the Sacs and Foxes I realized I was reading some of the most graphic description ever contained in an historical novel. Cap Huff and Doc Means are great characters in this book—great comedy parts. As for heroism, there is enough of that and to spare. Arnold and his almost superhuman exploits wholly convince. I have no hesitation in saying that I regard Kenneth Roberts, on the evidence of this one book alone, as the best historical novelist dealing with America that we have had in a blue moon.

Mr. Roberts is a Maine man, two of his ancestors were captains in the Continental Army, another was a privateer captain in the War of 1812. His descent is from such men as those of whom he writes. He himself served in the Siberian Expeditionary Force of the United States Army as a captain. He has been a Washington correspondent and a foreign correspondent. In his own home town he had recourse to such records as would be those of the township he has created, of Arundel. But recourse to fascinating material, and even a good memory for history and an insight into the motives of men, do not account for the solid narrative virtues of a novel like "Rabble in Arms." It is the work of a writer born. It is also a fresh and unbiassed view of the American Revolution, and as such a valuable historical document. Lastly it is a great glowing canvas of an extraordinary epoch. We may hope that Mr. Roberts will continue to create other romances with an American historical background.



AARON BURR
From "A Book of Americans"

History on Holiday

(Continued from first page)

"Alfred the Great" (on the well-known occasion) in appropriate cheerful Saxon metre:

By glow
King stretcheth,
rye dough
Slut fetcheth,
no whit
King heedeth
Whiles it
Slut kneadeth.
Hearth warmeth,
Alfred lieth,
Storm stormeth,
Alfred drieth.

Sometimes, in the American book, we sense the current a little deeper. We feel it in the verses on Robert E. Lee:

While all through the South
The quick whispering ran,
"If Marse Robert does it,
I reckon we can."

We feel it most in "Nancy Hanks":

You wouldn't know
About my son?
Did he grow tall?
Did he have fun?
Did he learn to read?
Did he get to town?
Do you know his name?
Did he get on?

Yes, we know his name; and we know now the names of two new books, illustrated in black and color, that will shelve very nicely in any log cabin or Riverside Drive apartment, or (for that matter) in Berkeley Square.

Mood Over Matter

THE ENCHANTED VILLAGE. By Edward Shanks. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1933. \$2.

SOME Londoners have been invited down to East Marriner (one of those Sussex villages) to play cricket and afterwards to dance in the old barn: and in the space of a dark summer's night we are told once more that appearances are very deceptive. Mr. Shanks tries hard enough. He tries to create a heavy, brooding atmosphere in which the most astonishing reversals of fortune and character may happen: but somehow or other it is the atmosphere alone which overwhelms his story.

The sultry night advances and *pari passu* the characters retire—into non-entity. Hour by hour it grows hotter and hotter; page by page the reader becomes more and more listless: it is a positive triumph of mood over matter. A great many things happen—a girl loses her virtue, a husband loses his wife, a business man loses his job, an innocent young lawyer loses his heart; but all these events yield up their little passions and ironies to the general somnolence. For Mr. Shanks, like his characters, has lost something too—he has lost his vigor. His style, which counterfeits simplicity, is weary and elaborate; and his slender little story is weighted down with sleep.

The BOWLING GREEN

Translations from the Chinese

A CHILD READING

Oh happy miracle of childhood reading—
Andrew Lang's Red, Green and Yellow Fairy Tales,
Gulliver, the Arabian Nights, Edward Lear,
Louisa Alcott, E. Nesbit, *At the Back of the North Wind*,
Hans Andersen, *Chatterbox*, *Saint Nicholas*,
Mayne Reid, Uncle Remus, *The Jungle Books*—
Even poor old Oliver Optic and G. A. Henty—

Why is it that now I never find that unconscious oblivion
Except in Detective Stories?

* *

A TWINGE

I suddenly realize
I am irreparably Mature
When long-legged children
Who played in the back yard with my own urchins
Come to town, get jobs, rent apartments of their own,
And the real estate agent writes me
That they've given my name
As a reference.

* *

WARNING

But the children I most admire
Are like everyone else:
They enjoy best
The books that were not
Too obviously
Intended for them.

Perhaps everything
Deliberately written for a special audience
Is second-rate.

* *

LIFE AND LETTERS

He woke at 4 A. M.
And said to himself,
"It's unwritable."
The Unwritable replied:
No, only unwritten.

* *

THEY HAVE THEM TOO

Did you know, said Max Schuster,
That in France the book trade calls a "plug"
A *rossignol*—viz. nightingale.

Delightful, said the Sage; but why?
Probably, cried Max, because it sings
And no one listens to it.

POLLOCKS SIDE WINGS TO SUIT ANY PLAY



London. Published by B. Pollock 73 Hoxton Street, Hoxton.

ELEGY IN A BROADWAY DRUGSTORE

When the Old Mandarin's musical comedy
Went up on the Cut Rate Boards
At Gray's Drug Store
He remarked:
"Wasn't one of your famous poems
Called Gray's Elegy?"

* *

ALL OUT OF STEP BUT BILL

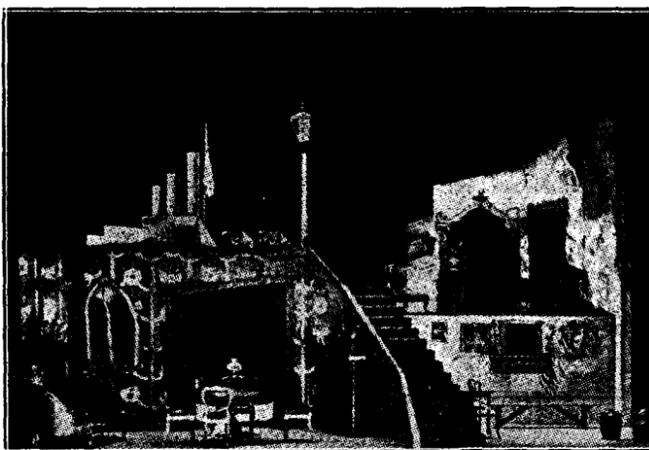
Life's only a comedy
Said his friend the Privy Counsellor—
You must take it in your stride.

But so many, grieved the Old Mandarin,
Seem to take it
In someone else's stride.

* *
COMIC STRIP

When the Old Mandarin
Was taken to a Burlesk Show
At first he was a trifle scandalized,
But he soon got the idea
And whenever a lady came up the runway
In billowy raiment
He learned to look for
The snappers on her gown
And could accurately foretell
Just how and where she would begin
To remove it.

But after a long evening
Of that sort of thing
He began to mutter,
"Almost persuadedst thou me
To become a vegetarian."



"Synthetic-realistic" set by Komisarjevsky for Hatter's Castle, (Edinburgh, 1932) representing simultaneously a sitting-room, a pub., a brothel, and a city square. (Courtesy Studio Publications.)

IN PRAISE OF POLLOCK

When I hear about modern stage-designers
And their solemn names for themselves
(Expressionist-realists, cubist-constructivists,
Gordon Craigists and abstract-mechanicalists)
I am tempted to call myself
A B. Pollock-Hoxtonist.

Good old B. Pollock, in Hoxton,
Inherited "Skelt's Juvenile Drama"
With scenes "a penny plain and twopence coloured"
Praised so long ago by R. L. S.
And still in that ancient shop
In a dingy London street
Builds toy theatres for children.

With the theatres came sheets of character and scenes
And scripts of the plays—*Ali Baba*,
The Children in the Wood, *The Miller and His Men*—
There never was any better fun
Than painting the scenes to suit your fancy
And pushing the actors in and out
On little tin slides.

Good as anything at the Moscow Art Theatre
Are old Pollock's stylized sceneries
And his "Side Wings to Suit Any Play."

* *

THE PROPERTY EGG

"No liquors and/or wines,"
Says the Alcoholic Control Board
"Shall be sold or served
Except at tables where food may be served."

Will it be as it was aforesaid in some cities?
They placed on the table beside one's drink
(Elastic, livid, and perdurable,
Never intended to be eaten)
A Property Egg.

* *

PUBLICITY MAKES PEACE

The Camera is the great pacifier.
In the rotogravure sections
The Great American Bulk first learned
That a Soviet commissar
Looks quite human.

* *

SET BACK

O terraced perpendiculars!
See, said the happy architect
Expounding a new group of metropolitan miracles,
The triumph of modern design
Is the set-back.

Yea verily, murmured the Merchant Prince
It set me back
About a hundred million.

AN EXAMINATION

Our studious client John A. Holmes (28 Bingham Street, Somerville, Mass.) has amused himself in compiling an examination paper for habitual readers of this paper. I give his address because any replies to this questionnaire had better go to Mr. Holmes rather than to the Bowling Green—I couldn't answer all the questions myself.

Here is his questionnaire:

EXAMINATION FOR THE DEGREE OF R. E.
(Reader Extraordinary) of the S. R. L.

1. Identify the following names, titles and phrases: "The Salad Bowl"; type lice; Quertyuiop; Mr. Moon; Homer Parsons; "Boar and Shibboleth"; W. A. Dwiggin.
2. What is the origin of: (a) The Amen Corner; (b) Sir Kenelm Digby; (c) The Romany Stain. Account also for their use in the S. R. L.
3. Discuss the successive incarnations of the Phoenix Nest in context and appearance.
4. Name five long poems from each of which the S. R. L. printed generous excerpts. Give authors, title of whole poem, and part printed.
5. What full-length books have been serialized in the S. R. L.?
6. What satirical poet has spoken frequently and pungently from the pages of the S. R. L.?
7. Give the names of all the men who have at one time edited the rare book page of the Saturday Review.
8. What publishing house printed in its advertisement a gallant black and white picture of a ship to signalize the appearance of Volume 1, Number 1?
9. What poet was the subject of the first letter ever to appear in the section devoted to letters to the editor?
10. Name some departments and recurring features that no longer appear in the S. R. L.
11. How did Boston make the first page of the *Saturday Review*?
12. Who challenges the professors of American universities with battle in his accents, and where?
13. (This question may be omitted by those who rarely read poetry or never by any chance remember any) How many of these lines can you identify? They have all appeared in poems published in the *Saturday Review*. Can you give author and title?
(a) Jack hitched into his sky blue bob.
(b) Try tropic for your balm.
(c) Enter, and hark the dithering of the dead!
(d) Memory's charity, lovingly vast.
(e) Calmly she turns, amusingly attired.
(f) Suddenly, after the quarrel, while we waited.
(g) With poison ivy on his head.
(h) I do like gin and bitters, also pubs.
(i) But absolutely
O so minutely
Adequate, suitable, right.
(j) What furniture, from what strange stores?
14. On what occasion was a picture published in the S. R. L. representing a poet soaring above Chicago on a hog, and strumming a lyre?
15. Who lit a "friendly gorgeous fire" and burned up the folio of *Romeo* and the original MS of *King Lear*, as well as an arm of the True Cross and a leg of the piano?
16. Who saw herself in a room panelled with mirrors, and wrote an essay about it for the S. R. L.?
17. Who spoke of Emily Dickinson as "acting coy among the immensities"?
18. Who was the young man of 22 or so whose letters the Bowling Green is privileged to look over from time to time?

JOHN A. HOLMES.

I like Mr. Holmes's idea, and (if he receives any replies) I will award a complimentary subscription-renewal to the three most complete answers. Mr. Holmes himself must be the final judge.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.