

Books, Men and  
Biography

# Alms for Oblivion

By George Carver

Dr. Carver, teacher of a graduate course in biography at the University of Pittsburgh, has made this leisurely study of men of letters who have contributed in some significant way to the development of biography as a recognized form of English literature. He covers biographic history from the days when Adamnan wrote of St. Columba and produced a "Life" which became "a stone in the foundation of invaluable literary form," through the following twelve centuries. Presented are such authors as More, Harpsfield, Cavendish, Walton, Dryden, Johnson, Boswell, Irving, Lockhart, Macauley, Carlyle, Gamaliel Bradford, and Lytton Strachey.

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Biographers are considered as individuals in sketches of their lives and fascinating accounts of the subjects of their biographic work are included. These are followed by discussions of the relationship between biographer and subject and the effects of these relationships upon their literary work. Thus the human and social aspect of the art is considered as well as the critical and historical.

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Every student of literature will welcome this appraisal of true biography which lays bare the very soul of the person portrayed . . . his aims, motives, longings, ambitions . . . and describes his visible achievements in contrast with the "fictional" treatment so prevalent today. ". . . a unique contribution to letters . . . combines awe-inspiring scholarship with engaging readability."—*Boston Globe*.

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## Divine Office for the Laity

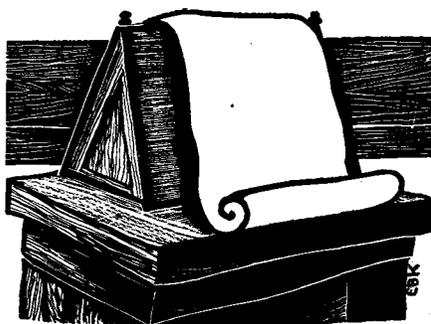
*EXILE IN THE STARS.* By James J. Donohue. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1945. 65 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by  
SR. M. MARGUERITE, R.S.M.

THIS is certainly a book that does not follow any conventional form. Its arrangement might seem at first puzzling to the uninitiated yet this is by no means a work of abstruse esotericism. The author evidently tried to make the variety of rhyme patterns and verse forms correspond to the prolific species of creation.

Father Donohue has compressed the account of the creation, the fall, and the prophecy of Redemption into the pattern of the Divine Office, with its introductory prayer, its Matins, Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sexte, None, Vespers, and Compline, its interweaving of antiphons, versicles, responses, and its final invocation. Here is the beginning of the theological tract on Redemption set to exquisite lyricism. The nine sonnets embodying the three nocturns of Matins take their theme from the introductory antiphons. With penetrating skill, Father Donohue has projected the story of Genesis all through succeeding years down to the present, as evidenced particularly in Antiphon 6: "God made the stars and said":

This is for wise men. Clipper and  
cruiser reckon  
Midnight by Vega climbing in the  
spars,  
Vigilant Bear and Dragon chart and  
beckon  
Sailors, but only wise men track  
the stars.  
Watch the empiric, you that put  
faith in counting,  
Number the suns which prowl be-  
yond Altair:  
You that prize reason out of eye-  
sight mounting,  
See the dark star-dust hunted to its  
lair.  
To these, if any, heaven shows the  
glory,  
And sky declares the work, and  
day has word  
For day, and night, for other night  
has story  
That needs no speech or language  
to be heard.



Not only three come star-led to  
My birth:  
The sound of suns goes to the  
end of earth.

This is language star-dusted with appreciation of beauty at its primal source.

The three sonnets for Sexte, which he introduces with the Antiphon "It is not good for man to be alone" present a thought-provoking study of all womanhood, as embodied in Eve. All three sonnets would be well worth reproducing, if only for the pleasure of copying them. But space prohibits such indulgence. Suffice it to note that the final couplet in this section is seedling for a whole forest of fiction, history, and biography books:

Eve comes to judgment guilty, nor  
alone.  
Let him that is without sin cast the  
first stone.

Father Donohue's work is a remarkable achievement in literature. Its conception, development, and conclusion are unified and strengthened by the haunting refrains of the antiphons, versicles, and responses.

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E. P. DUTTON

# A Connaught Shanachie

AND THAT'S NO LIE. By Beatrice Bill Talbot. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1946. 134 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by FRANK J. HYNES

IF Maria Edgeworth were alive today and contemplated bringing the Rackrent family history up to date, she might do worse than choose John Linehan to carry on where Honest Thady Quirk left off. John Linehan is a man with a story-telling gift the shanachies of old might well have envied—an art as simple and natural as a daisy, a brogue mellow as the notes of the blackbird, and a humor as sweetly flavorsome as a hazel nut.

Forty years John has worked on the Brookline (Mass.) estate of Dr. Fritz Talbot, and now nearing three score and ten, nostalgia has worked him for its own, whisking him back on its magic carpet to relive the early years of his growth in County Roscommon, Ireland. Mrs. Talbot must have listened to this story many times before finally setting it down in black and white, so completely has she captured the native Irish accent, idiom, and rhythmic speech patterns. She has let John tell his story in his own words and manner without let or hindrance, or intruding herself in any way. She has been content to let the honey drip richly and purely from the comb. A little of the beeswax comes through, to be sure, but that only prevents cloying.

When only thigh-high to a thrush, John had a scrimmage with a red-headed school teacher which put an end to his scholastic career. This melee, to readers who suspect symbolism of hiding behind every gooseberry bush in Celtic literature, may easily be construed as a battle royal between Queen Maeve (a Roscommon lass herself) and Cuchullain. Now John grew up as cocky as Cuchullain, who has been heard of as a hero, but poor John we now hear of as a herder. We follow him through green fields and purple hills as he herds his sheep and cattle—through barnyards, stables, and villages, living his simple annals. He hies us to county fairs, pheasant drives, fox hunts, and horse races. With young eyes and the old wisdom, he gives us shrewd estimates of the perennial country doctor, the goodly village parson, the hearty county squire and his horsey daughter, to say nothing of his own father's family of thirteen, snugly ensconced in a cottage small by a waterfall.

John loves horses and understands them as well as any vet. His horses

all have tales, and the tales are so well told that they deserve a wink of approval from Somerville and Ross. The nearest John ever came to a higher education was when he got off at Maynooth instead of Myglare,



County Kildare, on his way to a job as groom to the sporting Captain Tuckett. He was in his glory there, for Kildare is synonymous with horse-flesh, the famous Curragh having bred more Derby runners than one could shake a shillelagh at.

And then came spring. Gossoon meets colleen. In Ireland, a young man's fancy as lightly turns, and twice as sprightly as in any other part of this world of rue and radar, to thoughts of love. He follows her to America and marries her. Slainte! John! Slainte! Margaret! Readers who are bored to death by too much psychiatric cockalorum will welcome this exhilarating breath of bracing Irish air.

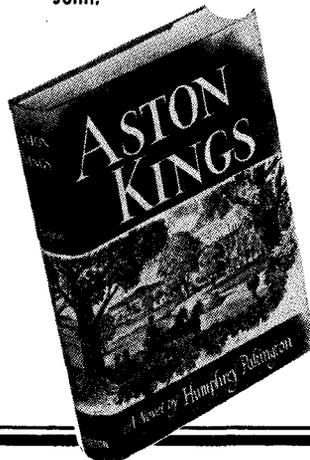


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