The Sunday Tribune's News and Reviews of Books and Authors

A Bookman's Day Book

By Burton Rascoe

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS have just brought out the first volume of a new edition of George Santayana's "The Life of Reason," for which Mr. Santayana has written an extraordinarily candid and illuminating preface. During the twenty years that have intervened between this biography of the human intellect and the preface which reviews it Mr. Santayana has come to a point where he no longer puts much faith in the efficacy of what these books celebrate, namely, human reason. Where once he saw the intellect determining and formulating codes for the higher good and insuring the ordered progress of mankind, he is now not quite so sure. "'The Life of Reason,'" he writes, "has become in my eyes a decidedly episodical thing, polyglot, interrupted, insecure. I cannot take every phase of art or religion or philosophy seriously simply because it takes itself so. These things seem less tragic than they did, and more comic; and I am less eager to choose and to judge among them, as if only one form could be right." Thus it is that the philosopher has come to see all philosophy as poetry only, as subjective in essence as any work of the imagination. Instead of "The Life of Reason," he says, his work should have been entitled "The Romance of Wisdom," for "Moral philosophy is not a science. It moves exclusively in the realm of familiar discourse . . . The uses of science remain human, in that it employs the mind nobly, chastens the feelings, or increases the safety and comfort of life. To investigate nature or to refine dialectic beyond those uses, out of mere curiosity, may be an innocent automatic impulse in men of science, but it is vain. Physics and dialectic accordingly enter the life of reason only as developments of human discourse, colored by human passions and serving them: the moralist accepts their reports, as he does those of memory and history, that they may enlighten him about the conditions and the possible forms of happiness. His own art, to which this book is essentially dedicated, is to express his reasoned preferences among all the forms of experience which his imagination can propose." That Mr. Santayana's reasoned preferences differ much in what he now calls his maturity from the reasoned preference implied in "The Life of Reason" is in no sense a contradiction of the amiable skepticism which informs all of his later writings. It is, indeed, an earnest of it; because, as he points out in "Soliloquies in England," the work of the essayist, the poet and the philosopher is to suggest each in his different fashion the possibilities of life that each of us may choose what we wish to follow, according to the dictates of our hearts and temperaments. "In order to discern this healthy life, for the soul no less than for the body," he writes, "not much learning is required; only a little experience, a little reflection, and a little candor." These are the qualities, to which he adds the charm of a beautiful prose style, which make Mr. Santayana perhaps the most readable, the most enjoyable, the wisest of living philosophers.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17

In the last issue of "The Freeman" Mr. Albert Jay Nock writes that he has put in an unprofitable hour on each trying to read "Ulysses" and "Jurgen." This does not prevent him from declaring summarily: "I know for a certainty that no sane man could have written the book ('Ulysses'), because no sane man could possibly stay awake while he did it. Moreover, no sane man can read it—really read it—because he cannot keep his mind on it. There is nothing for him to keep his mind on. The thing simply cannot be done. It defies any power of concentration that can be mustered." God grant me security from such sanity as this! I thank a benevolent Providence which endowed me with a madness which enabled me to read this book with the greatest ease and interest from cover to cover, finding it nowhere difficult of comprehension and as coherent and as unified as any novel by the acknowledged masters of fiction. I am glad that among my similars are such madmen as Arnold Bennett, Valery Larbaud, H. G. Wells, Mary M. Colum, J. Middleton Murry, Ernest Boyd, Edmund Wilson jr., Ferris Greenslet, Gilbert Seldes and divers others who have gone on record as having brought to the book a power of concentration and understanding, which is insane enough to encompass the book without strain or pain. It is a comfort to reflect that none of these had the sanity to observe that the pages of Mr. Joyce's novel "read precisely like a stenographic report of the outpourings of excited imbeciles." To us madmen Mr. Joyce's pages read like nothing of the sort; to our disordered minds it is Mr. Nock's pages which answer more nearly to that description. As perhaps the most balmy of the madmen I can see no sense whatever, for instance, in this dictum of Mr. Nock's "The primary canon of good art, the first condition put upon a story teller, is objectivity, absolute disinterestedness." To me that is simply, frankly not so; and I should be much obliged to Mr. Nock if he will tell me one single work of art wherein this canon is observed.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Among the books which came in today was a new edition of the late Henry Morley's translation of Voltaire's "Candide," with some extraordinary illustrations by Alan Odle. These drawings are like hallucinations or queer dreams in which human beings take ridiculous, writhing shapes and every conceivable ugliness of the body is exaggerated. They emphasize the sardonic and acidulous wit of Voltaire, but from another angle, another point of view; they are hardly in character with the spirit of the satire. . . . My wife and I went to New Rochelle for dinner with Lucile and Horace Liveright and found there Eddie Mayer and Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Siegel. Horace told how he had gone to see Bernard Shaw when he was in England, and how, being nervous over the experience of meeting the great man, he consumed fifteen or twenty cigarettes in the drawing room before Shaw put in an appearance. Shaw was at once critical, cold, abrupt and visibly irritated. Mrs. Shaw came in a moment later and sniffed the air significantly and disdainfully; but it was not until the next day that Horace learned how unpardonable an offence he had committed by smoking in the Shaw household. He encountered Lee Simonson, who had similarly polluted the Shavian air and who has received an indignant letter from Shaw the morning after his visit, declaring that it was an outrage for a man of Simonson's talents to ruin his brain with tobacco.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19

To breakfast this morning at the Brevoort with Hendrik William Van Loon and his wife, who had arranged for a large party, but three of the wives, including mine, declined to get up that early on Sunday morning. The Van Loons, who have just returned from a trip through Holland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Lapland, said they had come back hundred per cent Americans, believing this to be the only habitable country left on the globe. "Europe is done for," said Van Loon. "There is no spirit left in the people. They had lost all hope, and they simply live on from day to day, caring not a damn about anything. The poverty, misery and squalor are unbelievable. Literary workers in Vienna, Munich and Berlin haven't had any money for years to buy anything to work with or to keep abreast of the literature in their field. Holland and Denmark are glutted with money, but prices have gone up so that only tourists and profiteers can afford to buy anything except the bare necessities of living. Norway is a terrible country, and once you look at it you begin to understand the bleak, dreary, bitter outlook on life of a man like Ibsen, an irritable old man running a small apothecary's shop, who was jilted in his youth by a woman who married a town councillor and became a multipara, and who thereafter hated families and any one officially connected with municipalities. The cliffs and rocks of the country are so barren of earth that when any one dies they have to row sometimes for miles to find soil deep enough to bury the body. Christiania has one street, like the main street of our small Western towns, and it is bleaker and drearier than most of them. Nationalism is the curse of Norway, as it is the curse of all Europe. Every little canton wants its individual language or dialect. A man like Knut Hamsun in order to get an audience has to invent a jargon of his own in order to be read, because the Norwegians refuse to read anything written in the convenient Dano-Norwegian. It is a comfort to get back to America, where one can breathe more freely, where there is some hope left and where one can get a decent place to eat and sleep."

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20

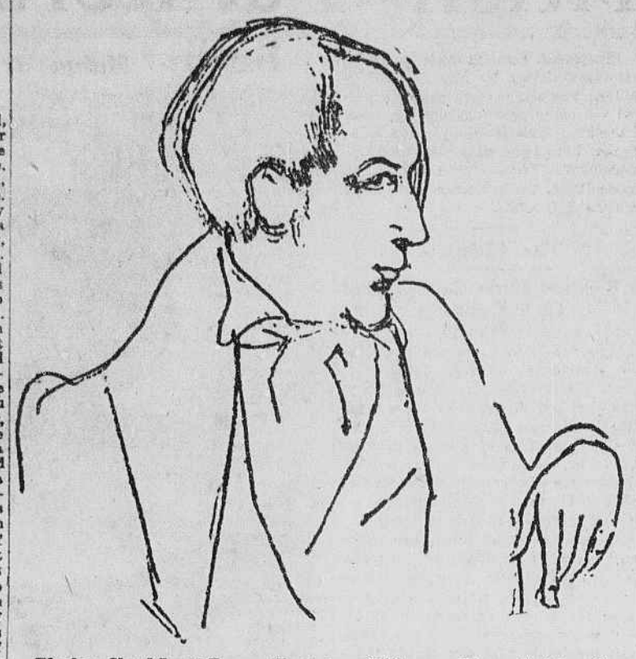
Lunched with Edmund Wilson jr. and Dr. Henry Seidel Canby, and we talked about university life, T. S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken and Amy Lowell. Dr. Canby and Wilson were agreed that conditions in university life after one has gained a full professorship tend to make men complacent and unprogressive, because it gives them security of position and authority; but Dr. Canby, who has had experience, denies that college professors are as bad as Mencken paints them. The tendency, he says, is for a man who has attained his full professorship to shirk his job; he gives the same lectures year after year; he becomes exclusively and selfishly interested, particularly if he is teaching a special branch of science, in his own subject, and does not teach it as a factor in general culture. There are, however, especially in the English and language departments of universities, men who keep abreast of the times and know what is going on in the world and who stimulate a lively interest in literature in their students. . . . Went with Alta May Coleman to-night to a dinner party given by Lee Meader, the architect, in honor of Miss Edna Richmond's birthday. Among the guests I recall were: George Luks, Bob Chanler, Prince Paleologue, Signor del Papa, Maurice Lafarge, Egbert Whithorne, Norman Trevor, Robert Warwick, John Stapleton Cowley-Brown, Isabel Paterson and Audrey Maple.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21

While I was at lunch to-day with Willy McDermott, the Cleveland dramatic critic, Carl Van Vechten gave me a copy of the "Globe" wherein N. P. Dawson denied that she had ever lunched with me. I am sorry if I offended; I had no wish to do so. My mentioning our having had lunch together last week was merely a wish-fulfillment on my part, for I have long wanted to meet her; but I haven't had that pleasure, I must confess. And let me on my part deny her flattering assumption that I invent the whole "Day Book" and actually see no one. That would be an ideal way, I suspect, to do the thing; but, except for this one instance, I have had to exercise only memory. . . . With my wife to-night to see "The World We Live In," the only play I have seen this year (and with one exception last year) which I should like to have written. It is mean and sardonic and bitter and more than a little morbid, but it shook up a number of my little complacencies. As Charley MacArthur said after the show, if the play were taken very seriously every one in the audience would go home and cut his throat, but the catharsis of such a play is, I think, a healthy one. . . . Charley, Hazel and I went around to the Hungarians' in Second Avenue to listen to the music and have a bite to eat, and I thought how wonderful it would be if I were as splendid and as exalted as I feel when I hear fine music.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22

Lunched with John Cournos, author of "Babel," and he told me of Maurice Hewlett's prophecy in "Wiltshire Essays" that capital would in time desert England and with it would go the skilled workers and laborers and middlemen who are dependent upon capital, leaving the country again entirely in the hands of farmers, sheep-raisers and fishermen. "I think Hewlett is right," said Cournos. "The British Empire is breaking up. All Europe is done for; the people are in a hopelessly despairing condition. The English are the last to show it because they are so stolid and unemotional, but even they are now losing their grip. I tried to give some sense of what is happening in Europe in the last pages of 'Babel.' Hewlett says that when capital and its dependents leave England, the artists will stay because they will be either too indifferent or too lazy to leave, and that it will be a good thing for them, for they will have to create simple and fundamentally significant things for an unsophisticated and primitive audience." . . . Went up stairs to chat with Don Marquis this afternoon and realized the penalities of being rich, for so general is the report of the great financial success of "The Old Soak" that bond salesmen, realtors and insurance agents pester the life out of the poor fellow from morning to night. Don says that at sixty he will either be rich or a beggar, and if he is rich he will own a yacht, whereon he will write sonnets and cork them up in bottles and if editors want them they will have to fish for 'em. . . . My wife and I saw "Six Characters in Search of an Author" to-night and it is so excellent and unusual a play that I thought, remembering my pleasure last night, that the theater has vastly improved in quality since the days when I was a dramatic reviewer. . . . Read some of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's "Studies in Literature: Second Series" to-night and was struck by the happy pointedness of this: "The only void in which Shelley ever beat his luminous wings in vain was a void in Mr. Arnold's understanding." Sir Arthur's essay on Byron, which is all I have had time to read, is a richly suggestive and entertaining essay; most of all it provokes in me a desire to reread Byron, something I never thought would ever happen to me. He says, among a number of startling things, "I believe 'Don Juan' will some day be recognized for one of the world's few greatest epics. I am sure that it is, after 'Paradise Lost', our second English epic." He compares it with the Iliad, not to its disadvantage.



The late Claud Lovat Fraser, illustrator of "Nursery Rhymes" (Knopf), and author and illustrator of "Pirates" (McBride), from a pencil and chalk drawing by Albert Rothenstein.

Paris News Letter

By Lewis Galantière

AFTER a quiet summer the autumn publishing season brings a flood of novels and tales by worthy and honorable writers in whom distinction is rarer than fecundity. "On devient cuisinier, on nait rôtisseur," said Brillat-Savarin, a remark which may be adapted to the idea that one becomes a man of letters, but is born a novelist. Balzac, for example, was predestined to be a novelist. The "Temptation" and "Bouvard et Pécuchet," so dear to the professional Flaubertist, can hardly be called novels. Neither was the author of "La Chartreuse de Parme" a novelist by imperious vocation. Zola and Daudet were novelists born, a judgment which cannot be pronounced on France, Loti, Barrès, Bourget or Henri de Regnier, though each of these has written a great many romances.

As a matter of fact, novel writing is a type of literature so supple and malleable that a man of talent may always succeed in it if he is interested to do so. Here the novel differs from the successful play (I avoid the word drama), for which, as Uncle Sarcey said, one must have the "gift." The danger for the born playwright or novelist lies in the fact that their particular aptitude for lending verisimilitude to insignificant events draws them into the pit of superficial potboiling. Arnold Bennett, in certain ways a writer of unmatched talent, is an excellent example of what I mean.

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I am moved to this reflection by a reading of Mr. Louis Bertrand's "Cardenio ou l'homme aux rubans couleur de feu." Mr. Bertrand is a Normalien, an "agregé de l'Université" and a Litt. D. who never followed a university career. He commenced his literary activity with several novels about Life, excellent, modern, realistic stories. With his "Saint Augustin" (delicately and faithfully translated by Vincent O'Sullivan) he changed his manner. At this time he was living in Algeria. The study of north African manners and customs, combined with a solid Latin culture, a Catholic sympathy with the somber figure of the great theologian and genuine talent for picturesque writing, produced a superior fiction. He followed "Saint Augustin" with two tales of history and adventure, over which "Cardenio" is a notable advance. This is the story of the marriage of Marie-Louise, daughter of Henrietta of England and Louis XIV (or Monsieur, the brother of Louis XIV—the point remains obscure) and Charles II of Spain. The portrait of the young monarch, a degenerate idiot, sensual, jealous and passionately in love with his wife, is excellently drawn. The little queen is the queen of "Ruy Blas," bored and tyrannized by the stupidity and solemn etiquette of her sinister court. The intrigue is furnished by a devoted cavalier (Cardenio) and color is furnished by capes, swords, disguises, kidnapings, spies, adultery and the poisoning of the king. But Mr. Bertrand is too much the man of letters, not sufficiently the born novelist, to be able to fabricate this stuff with the conviction it demands for success.

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Mr. Edmond Jaloux is coming more and more into view as one of the novelists respected by the right wing of the Paris critical world. This is an opinion which I cannot share but am obliged to record. Mr. Jaloux has just published a novel whose title is "Les Profondeurs de la Mer." The hero of his story is named Claude Lothaire. A man with such a name deserves what he gets, but Mr. Jaloux doesn't give him enough. Lothaire is a dramatist whose cheap plays are successful and whose great lyrico-symbolic "Prometheus" is a failure. He withdraws to the shores of the Adriatic with his second wife and their child. His career at end, he believes only in love, an ideal belief which carries him to the concomitant of adultery, and he loves a young Englishwoman named Gwendolyn Grove. Gwen is the wife of an English Buddhist, to whom life is appearance (as Mr. Bradley, of Oxford, would say) and not reality. A pretty theory for the husband of a lovely wife! The Englishwoman gives herself to Claude on the beach. Joy, ecstasy, supreme felicity! Three days later she and her fakir husband are drowned. Once more poor Claude has nothing to live for. At forty-six, his life is at end; his wife and child bore him. In his native town he finds again his first wife. They talk of religion and nature. . . . A readable book.

Writers and Their Market

By Kenneth Fuessle

THE BUSINESS OF WRITING. By Robert Cortes Holliday and Alexander Van Rensselaer. New York: George H. Doran Company. 1922. $2.00.

THE temple curtains are rent asunder, the seventh veil has fallen, and Parnassus stands revealed as one of the newer business districts — a composite, one might suggest, of Grub Street and Murray Hill. So, in classic language, be it. And so, with final apology for the twisted figure of these opening lines, to a consideration of "The Business of Writing."

The collaborating gentlemen have done a most thorough job. With informality bred of familiarity they have presented their subject with such completeness as to make unwarranted a further contribution in the same field for years to come. They "approach" the modern editor and find him a good man and true with a fondness for neat manuscripts, ability, and discriminating good sense; the modern publisher they discover as a man of perspicacity and efficiency. They deal honestly with literary agents and their "just rewards." They put a book through the press so competently that one feels that a model plant has been open for inspection. They suggest sufficient dark things about dishonest publishers to make wary the most unsophisticated inspired writers whose only chance of seeing themselves between covers is to pay excessively for those covers.

Other chapters include pertinent information on selling plays on contracts, royalties, copyright, photoplays (euphonious and thoroughly characteristic American word that!), reviews and *other* chores and syndicating. A comprehensive bibliography of books on writing is appended.

In short, one concludes, a handbook, and as a handbook dealing largely with intimate details of writing and publishing of limited interest. Unfortunate conclusion. Barring tracts on how to make liquor at home, it is hard to imagine a book that will be more popular.

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Mr. Rascoe with his usual deftness (Mr. Rascoe will please note) has characterized "The Business of Writing" as a "humanitarian service to editors as well as to authors." The service to editors consists in discouraging casual authors; the service to authors, on the other hand, consists in discouraging casual authors. This is as it should be. There is too much writing being done to no purpose by people who not only refuse to recognize the necessity for integrated thought, but who consider the craft about as specialized as eating and sleeping. As a result it is not unusual for large fiction publishers to receive as many as five or six hundred manuscripts a week, only one or two of which are in any sense considerable.

Also, there is too much writing being done by another type of person: one who devotes himself to endless correspondence courses and endeavors to achieve authorship not so much through writing experience as through following formulas. Perhaps this latter class is even more troublesome than the former. The person who thinks he can write because "he has always liked to write letters and is told by every one that he might as well write stories and won't the editor buy this because his children are starving," is never quite as persistent as the person who is No. 76,891 in the Blank Correspondence School, and who, naturally, wants to cash in on some of his blank checks.

The present volume has been an enjoyable chore; it may honestly be recommended to any one writing, or wishing to write, for a living. It is simple, frank, and informative. There is only one question: What sort of "playwrights" is an author permitted, on page 189, to sell to a producer?

"Jurgen": A Consideration

By Isabel Paterson

JURGEN. By James Branch Cabell. McBride.

JURGEN went a long and curious way in search of justice and ended up in a place where his creator never meant to send him.

That was the law courts, where a sensible judge vindicated him. At which one can imagine Jurgen being greatly surprised. But law and equity are recognized as separate abstractions; therefore, I should like to enter a plea for him in equity, for the removal of those disabilities of popular misunderstanding with which the law is powerless to deal.

Here is a book which has been more hotly discussed than any other publication of its time: you might then suppose that by this time everyone must know all about it. On the contrary, discussion thrives best on ignorance of the subject in hand. The general notion of "Jurgen" falls roughly into two divisions; one section believing it a slightly risque book which, nevertheless, should be allowed to circulate, because we ought to run the risk by way of a moral tonic; the other that it is a dangerously erotic story that only 'scaped whipping by good luck or inadvertence.

The fact that it is a really magnificent piece of satire, in the classic tradition, and about as erotic as Schopenhauer's foolish essay on women or a proposition in Euclid, is seldom or never mentioned. It is also a pleasant bit of fantasy which would probably amuse the children, and where it deals with sex, is quite as euphemistic as any sentimental love story. All love stories deal with exactly the same facts—in a slightly different manner, to be sure. The difference is that the love story would be more stimulating to youthful emotions and curiosities.

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"Jurgen" is really the most bleakly moral book I ever read. Consider the fable:

In the old days in Poictesme, we are told, there lived a poet turned pawnbroker, named Jurgen. Returning from his respectable shop one night, of sheer charity he spoke a word of sympathy for the devil—like Origen, that early Father of the Church. Out of a too officious gratitude the personage whom Jurgen had commiserated made away with Jurgen's shrewish wife, Dame Lisa. So then Jurgen was obliged to set forth, not on any frivolous adventure, but to recover his spouse, like a good husband.

On the way he met with a variety of strange creatures and happenings; but the substance of them is that of the story of the peasant who was granted three wishes and wished himself around in a circle, thankful to be back where he began. He was granted what we would all ask for, youth, health, wealth and what is generally understood to be happiness. All the sensual delights were offered him, though they are set forth in much less glowing language than that employed in the pulpit. In place of his scolding wife he was given Queen Venus herself, under her Armenian name of Anaitis. I believe this is considered the most objectionable portion of the book; one must therefore take heed not to smile over it, for that was the author's error. He forgot that to be licensed as a moralist and to speak of sin one must be earnest and indignant; must think sin worth sinning, in short. But Anaitis tries all her wiles and enchantments upon the questing husband. Before his eyes she parades all the "strange sins" and "fearful temptations" known to the most erudite eroticist or the sternest reformer. They are discreetly veiled; if you don't know what he is talking about, then you won't know what he is talking about; that is why it is quite a safe book for children and the ignorant.

And Jurgen politely observes all the customs of the country of Queen Anaitis, so far as he can. But he finds them all either tedious or funny to a man of intelligence. "I am afraid," he concludes regretfully, "that these are the games of mental childhood." Only of courtesy he is willing to "try some brand new diversion, at sight of which the stars will be blackened and the earth will shudder or something of that sort; and then I will take the children fishing, as I promised."

Could anything be more discouraging to the seeker after wickedness?

Romance, too, Jurgen has his fling at. But he is afraid of Romance—who is Helen of Troy! And the sentimental dryad turns domestic on him, which is the right end of sentiment.

Also he goes to the heaven of his grandmother, which he has never believed in. It brings wistful tears to his eyes—but still he cannot believe in it. Then he visits the hell of his forefathers, but neither has he the requisite fervor of faith to be at home there. Not his the character of his father Coth, whom he finds upbraiding the imps for not piling on enough fuel for so great a sinner as Coth has been.

Then naturally Jurgen is a confirmed materialist, if the rewards of Heaven and the pains of Hell alike are incredible to him? Not quite. When Pan takes him into the dark wood and shows him the material basis of life, the "tooth and claw," the blind and ruthless quality of it, Jurgen repudiates it with shuddering horror. That cannot be the whole truth. "I think I shall endure, somehow," he maintains desperately.

So, having had his second chance at everything, including his first love, and with the choice clear before him, Jurgen asks only to be a middle-aged pawnbroker again, with his scolding Lisa to make him comfortable. Respectability and matrimony suited him best after all. "There's no place like home." That was the doom of Jurgen; can you point a moral sharper than that?

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What then is the book all about? It is an allegory of the modern mind. Just as "Candide" examined and mocked at the mock-optimism of the lucky few of his day so "Jurgen" makes play with the easy-going cynicism of ours. That was the end of the age of faith. This is the age of agnosticism. Jurgen doubts even his own doubtings; he believes in nothing absolutely, until he is confronted by Nothingness, and then he quite frantically disbelieves in that.

In one sentence, by the way, he expounds the substance of Mr. Balfour's heavy book on "The Foundations of Belief." A thousand other contemporary mental states and credos are touched off in the same airy manner. Throughout nearly 400 pages the invention never flags and the fancy never stales.

Certain people should not read it, but then they won't. Your serious young intellectual will call it unimportant—because it laughs at him. And a great number of good and high-minded folk would hate it; because they live by faith, even if only a sort of Tennysonian "In Memorian" faith. To them an examination of their faith must necessarily be painful, for their faith is vital to them and yet at the same time not robust enough to defy examination. Such a book can only give them a genuine shock, a sense of spiritually naked discomfort, even though they defend themselves by instinct against understanding it. They are quite right, as any one is to hold by what will serve.

Those who find it erotic it cannot harm; they will find that in any love story or poem, since such is the main object of poetry and love stories, and not a bad one, either. Without literary and poetic embroidery, the business of love would be rather repellent.

But to readers already disillusioned, and still smarting from the process, it is a soothing and refreshing unguent—a reminder that even when the worst that can happen in an ordinary life has befallen, life is still bearable and amusing. They will find here defined the limits of disillusion.

Heine constantly gibed at Berlin as the city of Philistines. He instanced the fact, during a beer-garden chat, that irony was unknown by Berlinese. Nannerl, the pretty kellnerin, overheard and admitted regretfully: "That is true; we have no irony. But we have every other kind of beer." So when irony was offered to America for the first time, undiluted, it was confiscated as containing more than 2.75 of intoxicating content. And now that it has been officially certified to the contrary, very likely for that reason no one will be eager to drink it.

Morley as a Fantasist

By Charlotte Dean

WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS. By Christopher Morley. Doubleday Page & Co.

IT IS a question that I think should never be asked—not where the blue begins for that seems to be well worth asking, but the question which I have heard at least five people, otherwise intelligent, ask. They want to know what it all means, what it is all about, what the hidden, inner current signifies. And when they ask, I feel like picking up Mr. Morley's little book, tucking it inside my jacket, and running far away from such pestiferous vivisectors.

Gissing is the most charming hero I have met since the White Rabbit exclaimed "Oh, my fur and whiskers." His theology may be all wrong, his desertion of his three foster children may not have been truly kind, he is being accused of all the idealistic crimes and blunders in the calendar, but he has charm. With a deftly juggled teacup and meringue plate he won Mr. Beagle, senior, president of the great, beautiful department store. His masculine frankness delighted the Bishop so deeply that he made him lay reader in a chapel. His naiveté actually brought a smile to Captain Scottie's unaccustomed lips, though Gissing was fortunate in meeting the Captain at 5 o'clock, and no Briton is wholly implacable at tea time.

These matters sound like trifles; indeed, they are trifles, not uncommon either, but in Gissing they become charms. It is simply that the fellow has a gift, so that his most insignificant action seems weighted with importance and lightened by native grace.

The little thing that first drew me to Gissing occurred early in our acquaintance, in fact, on Page 4. He had been uneasy, restless, melancholy. Like a sensible person, he thought that comfort might be found in food, and he knew that there was a bowl of beef broth in the icebox. But Fuji, the butler, was rather correct, so Gissing was ashamed to do what he wanted to do while Fuji was around. Fuji was a very efficient butler, and Gissing had no desire to lose him by gratifying his desire to drink the beef broth out of the bowl. He pretended that he had come out to see that the ice-box pan had been emptied properly.

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As if that were not enough to capture me completely, a moment later he admitted, privately, so that Fuji knew nothing of it, that the ice-box pan was his test of a good servant. Of course, that might not mean so much to some one else, but to me it was very important. It was a bond. After that I liked Gissing so much that I did him the injustice to talk about his charms. The people I talked to met him, agreed that he was an extraordinary creature and then asked that shocking question about an allegory. Stuff and nonsense!

What more does one want than Gissing and his story? Gissing and the three urchins! Gissing and the big Charge Customer! Gissing and Captain Scottie and the unconscious mind! Gissing and anything! "Where the Blue Begins" is the only book I have read more than once since a certain publication last year.

Gissing took his responsibilities seriously. When Fuji, heartless servant, left him because of the extra work the three puppies made, Gissing gave up pursuing blue horizons. He had Mrs. Spaniel, the charwoman, come up from the village to do the laundry work for the youngsters. His own shirts and things he did himself. He used a little red express wagon, folding the linen neatly in the bottom, and letting the puppies ride on top. This device served the double purpose of getting his washing to the pond without letting any one see and giving the children a ride.

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There is a picture of the city whither Gissing went in search of the blue horizon. It is a rare, beautiful picture, as much in Gissing's mind as in the actuality. But Gissing's ideal of the city, persisting even after months of residence in it, is never overrefined or silly, because he knows it is not as beautiful or noble as he thinks it is. He is conscious that his meditations are lofty, and in the midst of them he can laugh a little at himself.

* * *

When Gissing became a floorwalker he came into a closer contact with the city's people. After the long day, directing ladies to departments whose locations they knew perfectly, but who asked him only for the pleasure of hearing him direct them, he amused himself by riding on the ferries or going home on the top of a bus. And then he meditated, and loved the city. "Oh, solitude, that noble peace of the mind. He loved the throng and multitude of the day; he loved people; but sometimes he suspected that he loved them as God does—at a judicious distance. From his rather haphazard religious training, strange words came back to him. 'For God so loved the world' . . . So loved the world that—that what? That He sent some one else . . . Some day he must think this out."

He was more fortunate than most of us. One day, when he had sailed an ocean liner into a strange port, he left his ship to explore what he believed might be an uninhabited island. And there he found God. There was a little bonfire of sticks where a miraculous being was cooking something in a tin can. The being was a dirty, ragged tramp. "Gissing stood, quivering with emotion. Joy such as he had never known darted through all the cords of his body. He ran, shouting, in mirth and terror. In fear, in a passion of love and knowledge and understanding, he abased himself and yearned before this marvel. Impossible to have conceived, yet, once seen, utterly satisfying and the fulfillment of all needs." God was a hiped and a tramp.

That is almost the end of the story, and I think it is a pity it is not really the end. For on the next page the blues begin. The rest of it is pretty, and I am glad to meet Mrs. Spaniel again and to hear Gissing tell his very moral Christmas story to the puppies, but it is too bad to let everything down. It is almost as sad as if the author had said right out loud, "And then he waked up and it was all a dream." Much as I like Gissing, I'd rather he had gone down with the Pomerania than he should live to come back and find the Bluebird in the fire box of the furnace. It is beautifully done, but it cannot be done beautifully enough. No, no, no! He should never have come back.

Nevertheless, it is for two hundred pages and more a blue and golden story and I am grateful for its existence. Among other things, it solves my Christmas problem.

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