

"Wolfe, Wolfe!"

NEWS OF THE DEVIL. By HUMBERT WOLFE. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1927. \$1.50.

LAMPOONS. By HUMBERT WOLFE. New York: George H. Doran. 1927. \$1.50.

KENSINGTON GARDENS. By HUMBERT WOLFE. The same.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMAYER

NOW that, hearing a few of the critical shepherds, all the uncritical sheep are beginning to cry "Wolfe, Wolfe!" it may be amusing to account for the belated bleatings. This will be complicated for the American reader, for Mr. Wolfe's volumes have appeared on this side of the Atlantic in any but chronological order. "Lampoons" was published in England at least a year before "News of the Devil" (which preceded the former here by a twelvemonth); the extraordinary "The Unknown Goddess" post-dated "Lampoons" in actual inception by more than two years; while "Kensington Gardens," now suddenly presented as a discovery, was, with the exception of the juvenile "London Sonnets" and the slightly less zymotic "Shylock Argues with Mr. Chesterton," Wolfe's first bid for plaudits.

Nevertheless we have had (including that strangely sentimental *tour de force*, "Humoresque") five volumes by this fecund poet and a wholly serious sixth, "Requiem," is to appear this autumn. What is the composite picture presented by the quintet? What are the strongly as well as the subtly defined features of the Wolfeian idiom? The surface characteristics are modern and obvious: an unusual delicacy of attack; a fondness for the "off-color" or "suspended" rhyme; a swift surety of technique; a touch that is staccato but somehow lingering; above all, a quaintly individualized charm that delights to play brightly in the minor keys and improvise nostalgically on a set of what started to be major chords. It is this contradiction which characterizes even the most affirmative of his volumes, an indetermination from which Wolfe seems unable to escape.

The poet cannot make up his mind whether to write sentimentally or satirically; whether to be Shylock, Chesterton, or the tragic Pierrot; whether to be the last of an old tradition of lyricists or the first of a new generation of ironists. As a result he is all of these in quick succession, often, indeed, at the same time. "Humoresque," the least remarkable poetically, is the most rewarding as a study of this paradoxical ambidexterity. In "The Unknown Goddess" the poem "Iliad" is as memorable a set of stanzas about poetry as was ever written, firmer and finer edged than O'Shaughnessy's "Ode;" and this is followed by half a dozen fragilities composed entirely of whipped cream and a spun-sugar *Weltschmerz*. "Lampoons" is the one volume which is undeviating in attitude; and even here, one suspects, only the stringency of the title and the brevity of the contents prevented the author from becoming charming about Lloyd George or oddly mystical concerning the Labor Party. Within the limitations of his quatrains Wolfe's touch-and-go epigrams are sharp and scintillant as any fencer's thrust. There is no faltering, no superfluous preparation, no waste motion in strokes as agile as:

ARNOLD BENNETT

Art is long, life short, save when it
is applied to Arnold Bennett,
whose Art was aimed (unless we wrong her)
to prove that life's a d—d sight longer.

or as neatly double-edged as:

G. K. CHESTERTON

Here lies Mr. Chesterton,
who to heaven might have gone,
but didn't, when he heard the news
that the place was run by Jews.

These lightly despatched cartoons are always tipped with the barb of satire but they are feathered with good will. In "News of the Devil" the feather is shortened, the point notched and, whenever the poet forgets his sometimes too conscious craftsmanship, envenomed. This lengthy poem-pamphlet is, in spite of the inevitable Wolfeian lapses into verbal prettiness, as savage a hymn of hate as has been chanted since Ernst Lissauer's, possibly since Byron's. It is a performance that will be welcomed, especially by those for whom his milk of human kindness has sometimes grown too thick. Wolfe's object of animus is the newspaper syndi-

cate, his Cain seems to be a composite of Hearst, Northcliffe, and Beaverbrook. Curiously enough, "News of the Devil" remains true to its theme and departs from it simultaneously. It begins, appropriately, in the tone of journalistic verse (clinched couplets, trick rhyming, etc.), but before the poem has reached its coda we are breathing rarefied air. Somehow Wolfe has surmounted his antagonism; and the reader, taken by degrees of surprise, has ascended with him.

"Kensington Gardens," though apparently more particular, is far less special. The least ambitious of Wolfe's volumes, it is sure to become his most popular. It will be ransacked by composers seeking illuminated texts. Tanagras like "The Old Lady," "Lamb," "Tulip," "Lilac," "Speke," "Queen Victoria," and "Two Sparrows," will be borrowed to prove how sweet are the uses of anthologies. Several of these have already attained the kind of contemporary fame achieved only by wall-mottos and week-end entertainers; but "The Rose," "Trebizond, Jonah, and the Minnows," "The Albert Memorial," and "The Young Man," still await their discoverer. I quote the first of these:

THE ROSE

Why should a man
'though six foot tall,
think he matters
at all, at all?

and, though he live
for seventy years,
does he suppose that
anyone cares?

Rather let me
to him propose
the flushed example
of the rose,

who, with her dazzling
inch of scant,
a summer's day
weighs imminent

upon the spirit
entranced, and goes
richer with that
than he with those.

This is Wolfe, the flower and the essence, all compact. The mildly ironic undercurrent, the not quite detached bitter-sweet overtone, the gift of exact yet fanciful epithet ("the flushed example of the rose," "her dazzling inch of scent"), the faint artifice which keeps the language from being either rhetorical or realistic—all disclose themselves in twenty miniature lines. The opening image of "The Grey Squirrel" has a similar whimsical definiteness, but the play and precision quickly develop into one of Wolfe's neatest double thrusts. One thinks inevitably of—But no, this review intends to pay respects to Wolfe's smiling malevolences without once mentioning the name of Heine. The verses say it for themselves.

THE GREY SQUIRREL

Like a small grey
coffee-pot
sits the squirrel.
He is not

all he should be,
kills by dozens
trees, and eats
his red-brown cousins.

The keeper, on the
other hand,
who shot him, is
a Christian, and
loves his enemies,
which shows
the squirrel
was not one of those.

It is such a poem (emphasized, extended and varied by a hundred) that makes Wolfe the most exciting of the newer English lyricists. Notwithstanding his occasional thinning of material and softening of the dulcet tremolo, he will be read with quickened pulse if only for his curious combination of bland romanticism and angry wit. And, finding this, the reader will be rewarded by finding more and—if the future can be approximated by the past—still more.

Inquiries are being made for the next-of-kin of the late G. J. Whyte-Melville, the famous sporting novelist, whose books were so popular with the last generation.

From an Inner Fever

A NEW TESTAMENT. By SHERWOOD ANDERSON. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by HAMISH MILES

IT is very easy to be deceived by a book like this. "Testament" is in itself an imposing word, in whichever sense one reads it. In that title there is the insinuation of something definitive, of a new order, a new dispensation, set forth for all to see. And the suggestions of the title are pushed a step further by the format of the book. It looks as if it might be the "Little Flowers" of St. Francis or the "Garden of the Soul"—red and black title, correctly Gothic headings, a spattering of neat rubrics, blue silk marker. It looks as if it might become the tried companion of one's meditative or midnight moments. It looks as if every reading, year after year, would bring out deeper, richer meanings, as if—but one should look closer before taking a testament at its face value.

"A New Testament" is a book of fragments. A certain number of them are brought together from "The Triumph of the Egg," but most of them appear for the first time. The publishers of the book are slightly on the defensive when they remark that by calling these new forms poetry, they lay them open to "the microscope of the precisionist critic and the carping conservative." But this is a pure matter of labels, and has little real meaning. It should be granted at once that the fragments have all the character of spontaneous and rhythmic expression which would entitle them to the label of "poetry." But there is no need to be unduly impressed by that fact. Poetry and sincerity may both be here. But they are not keys that will open every door: truth lies hid sometimes in places where a man must have more than these bare attributes if he is to discover it. And it is here that Anderson's claim to be laying forth a "testament," a statement of order and doctrine, falls short. The book is one of fragments. They have beneath them the vague unity of one voice, one rhythm, one persistent questioning and struggle, but not the real unity of consistent discovery. And fragments they remain.

But they remain highly characteristic of Anderson.

ONE WHO LOOKED UP AT THE SKY

It would be strange if, by a thought, a man could make Illinois pregnant.

It would be strange if the man who just left my house and went tramping off in the darkness to take a train to a distant place came here from a far place, came over lands and seas, to impregnate me.

There is a testament out of life to the man who has just left my presence. There is a testament to be made to a woman who once held me in her arms and who got no child. There is a testament to be made to this house, to the sunshine that falls on me, to these legs of mine clad in torn trousers, to the sea and to a city sleeping on a prairie.

✻ ✻ ✻

Diffuse and indeterminate, Anderson's ideas are never formulated to the satisfaction of a reader who is following him with *intelligence*, and not merely with an ear open to the filmy suggestions of a succession of loosely related images. Nor are they formulated to his own satisfaction. From first to last in these pieces, Anderson is a man groping in the thickets of his own words. For all the rhythmic beat of his phrases, the steady recurrence of these bare, stark images of pregnancy, of sex, of male and female, of cities and streets, the sense of Laocöon strivings—what happens? Does daylight flash suddenly through the forest? Does he ever rout his own phantoms? No: there is nothing but a rising tide of bewilderment. The bewilderment of this groping man is hidden at a first glance by the vivid sense of battling, sweating, physical effort which is conveyed by his spare, muscular words. But it is there, from first to last. The battle may be honorable, but it is without objective, undirected, baffled, protestant.

I have a passionate hunger to take a bit out of the now—the present. The now is a country to discover which, to be the pioneer in which I would give all thought, all memories, all hopes. . . . I would consume it quite. I would live my life in the present, in the now only.

For that purpose I would be ageless, impotent, potent, swift, a sluggish slow crawling worm, a singing rhythmical thing beating my wings, carried along for an instant in the flight of time. I would myself create a lull in the storm that is myself. If I am a stream gone dry, fill me with living waters. There is something stagnant in me. As I write, breathe, move back and forth in this room life is passing from me. Do you not see how I pass from one

present into another unknowing? I would leave nothing unknown. To live in the presence of the unknown is death to me.

That passage is from one of the longer fragments, "A Thinker." It is difficult to isolate quotations from a work like this with fairness, but it is typical enough of the essential insipidness which is unexpectedly revealed by Anderson when he dispenses with the solid framework of his storytelling. In the case of a novelist so significant as the author of "The Triumph of the Egg" or "Many Marriages," it is worth while entering a caveat against this barren mysticism of "A New Testament." It contains no revelation. It is a long hammering against a closed door. It is a mysticism of mere struggle, and not of enlightenment. Its neurotic violence is a counterpart of that other false mysticism which finds its devotees amongst those who are ready to abandon the discipline of human reason and institutions, to sink into swooning resignation, "in tune with the infinite." Both are dangerous, but Sherwood Anderson's the less so because he is so seldom persuasive. It is enough to turn for a few minutes from "A New Testament" to almost any page of "Leaves of Grass:" at once one realizes which comes from an inner flame, which only from an inner fever.

A Catalogue of Ships

NAVIES and NATIONS. By HECTOR C. BYWATER. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1927. Reviewed by THOMAS G. FROTHINGHAM
Captain, U. S. R.

THIS book is a "catalogue of ships" with a great deal of information as to the navies of the world since the Peace Treaty of 1919. The reader will find details of armament and armor, with explanations of the various types of warships and their functions. There are also interesting accounts of the different building policies and building programs, especially of the British Navy and the United States Navy, with their contrasting developments of the last few years. The reader will gain a vivid idea of the inordinate demands of a modern navy. These have been brought into being not only by the increase in the size of capital ships, but by the enormously increased flocks of auxiliaries of the Battle Fleet which are now regarded as necessary adjuncts for a navy.

Thinking in the old terms is no longer possible, and above everything stands out the multiplied cost of all types of ships—not only for their construction but for their maintenance. £7,000,000 a piece has been spent for the two most recent British battleships, and £540,000 is the annual bill for operating the huge battle cruiser *Hood*, the white elephant of the British Navy. These figures will give the average man a healthy prejudice against a "naval increase," and a corresponding sentiment in favor of the American doctrine of limitation of armaments. It is enough to read that "so long as the fleets are organized on the present system, there is no possibility of a reduction in the financial burden they entail, on the contrary there is every prospect of a further increase." *Absit omen!*

In regard to naval aims and objects, the author shares the usual trend of mind of the British naval writer, in apportioning these among the different navies along preconceived strategic lines. He is perhaps also influenced by his own writings in forecasting "next wars." It is strange that this has survived the experience of the World War, when all carefully laid out strategies were swept away in the flood.



For instance, pre-war deductions as to naval bases were at once upset. On the one hand, Kiaochau, the strongly fortified German naval base for which millions had been spent, was useless in the war. On the other hand, Admiral Spee's fleet of cruisers was assembled in the Pacific, by rendezvous from long distances and maintained itself with ease until Admiral Spee incautiously exposed himself to a superior force at Falkland Islands. If we keep the course of the World War in mind we will not subscribe to any conventionalized strategy for navies of the present day.

In citing the naval aims of the several nations, the British author, although absolutely friendly to the United States, cannot realize the entire lack of interest in "foreign policies" which is the characteristic of the American nation. For the British especially, foreign policies are so much

the breath of their nostrils, that they are apt to look upon our acts as inspired by motives akin to their own. This tendency is apparent in the author's treatment of the Washington Naval Treaty. He cannot help thinking that the United States had aimed at naval leadership. He writes of the effect on Great Britain, if the United States "had persevered in her intention to achieve battle-ship primacy."

As the effect of the Washington naval conference for the limitation of armaments is the main theme of the book, Americans should keep a clear mind in reading his account. As a matter of fact, the great strength of the United States Navy was the result of the 1926 building program, which was adopted only after incroachments of the German Imperial Government had shown the need of a strong naval defense. This program put us ahead of Great Britain in naval power, because it comprised the sound construction of battleships, at the time when the British Navy was committed to the mistaken policy of building faulty battle cruisers, which did not add to the strength of the British Fleet. But no march had been stolen by the United States, and defense alone was our object. And so far were we from any trace of future aggressive aims, that a provision was inserted in the act of Congress for stopping construction, if this could be made possible by an adequate tribunal for international agreement.

This last is what the author does not realize, and the Washington Naval Treaty was thus a realization of our original idea, not a change of heart from an imperialistic naval policy. The reader of this book must also understand that a mistake is made when it states: "The United States, for example, has already demanded and obtained parity with us in battleships and aircraft-carriers." Instead of this, the true statement of the case is, the United States willingly gave up an assured naval superiority, and by thus doing gave Great Britain a parity.

But, in spite of thus looking at our motives through European glasses, this book is an argument for the undoubtedly good moral effect and material benefit of the American policy of naval disarmament, and its last paragraph is wise advice to the British nation: "Clearly, therefore, our true interest lies in promoting the cause of naval restriction by every means in our power."

Critical Essays

GROTESQUES. By MARY CASS CANFIELD. New York: Harper & Bros. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by ARTHUR COLTON

"GROTESQUES" is the title of Miss Canfield's initial essay, and not very applicable to most of her subjects. The majority of these subjects are persons or plays. The best perhaps are "Mrs. Asquith"—not pleasant but very pertinent—"I, Mary MacLane," "Mon Ami Pierrot," and "Eleonora Duse." Miss Canfield is clear and pungent, but, better than that, she has interpretive ideas,—ideas that get underneath and shine up, which is the essential of creative criticism. She has shown something unnoticed before about "Mary MacLane;" very deftly and subtly analyzed the "Pierrot" concept, if one may so call it; painted delicately and accurately the portraits of Duse and Mrs. Fiske; and asserted effectively that modern vaudeville is important and that it is an art.

This is a description of her books which, like every good book of critical essays, must find its fit audience and be appreciated by them. Instead of further analyses therefore, let us quote salient paragraphs:

The grotesque, in its most naïve aspect, springs from a primitive love and fear of the unknown—a shuddering lust for the impossible. Art, Janus-faced, is either a celebration of reality or an escape from it: the passion for life as it is of a Balzac, or the opalescent, prophetic reverie of a Shelley. The grotesque, then, in its own cross-grained way, falls into the second category and is a denial of reality; it is a denizen of that unreal world so necessary to those whose feet are bruised by the hard road of fact. There are humans who must find wings or perish; some will even take to bats' wings. The grotesque is a twisted, fog-ridden forest in that Never-never-Land which is the home of those who find mortal flesh a prison.

Across this unbelievable realm of the grotesque falls the shadow of fear. It is part of man's unending search for sensation that he should thus build phantoms to pursue himself with, that he should assure to himself, in this way, the emotion of terror. There is a primordial cell in our brains which responds fearfully to the abnormal. Even while we experience a delicious shiver of pleasure at our fright, some-

thing cries out in us before the grotesque, like a child in a nightmare. We are inclined to shout, "This is not true!" so as to reassure ourselves. We may laugh at the "worm" in Siegfried, trailing his green cotton folds and gleaming his acetylene eyes with such amazingly German literalness, but we shall not restrain a quiver of nerves at his entrance, a shock at his noisy unnaturalness. And yet what a persistent attraction lies for us in the inharmonious, and how we shudder at and still pore over the diabolic deformity of a stone gargyle, the livid attenuated saints of El Greco, or the icily morbid fantasies of Edgar Allan Poe!

Journalist and Artist

FRANCE. By SISLEY HUDDLESTON. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1927. \$5.

THE SOUTH AFRICANS. By SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927. \$3.50.

Reviewed by BARTLET BREBNER

Columbia University

IN a sort of machine-gun fire of very short sentences, Mr. Huddleston's book shoots at its reader over six hundred pages of information about France and the French, with a somewhat numbing effect. If the first three chapters be set aside as the historical hash which is apparently inevitable as introductory setting in a book of this sort, the remainder can be described as first-rate material for a newspaper library or as an admirable encyclopædia for the conscientious soul who wants the facts, let us say, before going to France to meet the French. Of course neither use is entirely fool-proof. The French enjoy differing about themselves, and although the author does suggest alternative interpretations to his own, he cannot altogether escape the limitations imposed by his being the English Paris correspondent of liberal journals in Britain and America.

The journalist must at least seem to know most best, and Mr. Huddleston has obviously read the useful books about France as they came out. On the whole, indeed, he is perhaps more hospitable than a similar Frenchman would be to the kind of novel paradox or heresy which can prod complacency so sharply. Occasionally his remarks are general enough to apply to almost any land or any people, and his Englishry is strikingly obvious in his scorn for the way the French govern and finance themselves. It really seems to hurt him to see sacred parliamentary and financial institutions so abused. Moreover he writes pretty much as a Parisian and leaves us a good deal in the dark as to what the men of Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, and Lille really think of the Paris which for so many is France.

To sum up, the book is an honest, middle-course, bit of journalistic craftsmanship, apparently somewhat hurriedly written, with little pretence to style or charm except in scattered epigrammatic sentences; at the beginning ill-digested, but becoming most thoughtful and illuminating when it deals with France at Versailles and after. Novel restatements and pointed reminders of facts too often ignored somewhat relieve the tedium. Occasionally Mr. Huddleston has a marvelous temerity, witness "Nobody has any real sense of responsibility in France." Yet, curiously enough, he adds himself to the list of those who will not describe fully just what did happen to the French army in 1917.

"The South Africans" is literally a fascinating book, and it could be wished that all journalists might read it. This might ruin some good newspapermen, but it would be worth it if it did so by heartening them to answer again their higher callings. It is not only an ungrateful, but a very difficult task to sum up a nation's history, generalize about its people, and explain its present state, but here it is so simply and convincingly done as to make it seem easy, even in the case of South Africa, a country which is never able to be unaware of immanent and gigantic human issues. Reader and author are soon in an agreeable intimacy as they search in history and in present circumstance for a judgment on Trollope's assertion of fifty years ago that South Africa is, and will be, a country of black men. That brooding problem opens the book and gives it its unity, whether it be in discussion of farming, mining, politics, or sociology.

Perhaps the truest tribute that can be paid to this volume is that, having read it easily and delightedly, one closes it with an appreciation that weighty matters have been presented fearlessly, but in a pleasing and entertaining medium. There are crisp portraits of individuals like Rhodes and Smuts, or of the half dozen racial and linguistic types from Boer to Kaffir, and even the cities acquire individuality. There is almost no allusiveness, but much