

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

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### The Price of Books

SOMETHING should be said emphatically and immediately about the price of books. Everyone wants the price of books to go down. Everyone expects the price of books to follow the curve of other commodities, and if this continues downward, everyone will expect to purchase a new novel for some such price as it brought in 1900 or 1915. All readers hope for a reduction. Why not now?

The price of many books has come down. Books which sold at \$5.00 are now generally priced at \$3.50 or \$4.00, a 20% to 30% drop. But this affects only the non-fiction field where there was a sufficient margin of profit, and does not touch what might be called standard new novels, or other books published so as to be sold at from \$2.00 to \$2.50.

The problem here is far more difficult, and a few facts well known to the trade should be known also to the restless public who want books but want them cheaper.

In the first place, and this statement cannot be too strongly stressed, it is not true that drug store and bargain windows stuffed with "remainders" reduced from \$5.00 to \$1.00, to \$49, prove that new books are too high in price. A "remainder" is precisely what the name implies. It is a book which did not sell, and it is offered at a price below the cost of production, which represents, not a gain, but a loss to the publisher. Even in commodities like women's hats there are remainders which are due to change of style or bad guesses in the original design. In books, where every title is a separate commodity, such failures are certain to occur. If they are dumped to cut losses, this means, of course, that they could not be sold at, and sometimes were not worth, their original price, but in no sense indicates that other books were not worth the list price paid for them.

Reprints, usually sold at about a dollar or 75 cents, can, of course, be cheaper than new books. There is a greatly reduced royalty on copyright titles. These have already proved their worth, and an extensive sale is reasonably certain. The risk on the original publication of Strachey's "Queen Victoria" was considerable, and the cost great. The risk on a reprint edition is almost nil, and the cost far less. Royalties are reduced, the high cost of the original production of the books has been absorbed, the same plates used, and the work needs no extensive advertisement. That is, it was the success of the book at its original price which made the reprint possible.

As for new books, here are the facts. According to current conditions, unless a new \$2.00 novel sells more than 2,500 copies, it will not yield a profit to its publisher. For an edition of 2,500 copies (which is reasonably large for a novel and large for non-fiction) the publisher's costs, which include setting the type, plating the type, paper, printing, binding, advertising, selling expense, royalty, and a reasonable overhead, are about \$1.16 a copy for a novel of, say, 80,000 words, the average length. He must give to his bookseller a discount of about 42%, which the present condition of the bookselling trade indicates is not too high. Of course if the sales go well beyond 2,500 copies, the profits rapidly mount, but the best statistics available indicate that perhaps 80% of fiction titles never go beyond their first edition, and about 65% of non-fiction,

### The Flea

By JOHN DRINKWATER

I F ever at Saint Peter's gate  
I call "Who's there within?"  
And he, the bailey, bids me wait  
The audit of my sin,  
I'll make no plea, in my defence,  
Of charity or continence.

I know too well how meagre still  
Has been my love's excess,  
What poor infirmity of will  
My chronicles confess,  
To ask that these should mitigate  
The resolution of my fate.

But I will take a garland green  
Of quiet English hours,  
"Of such," I'll say, "good saint, has been  
My learning." And the flowers  
Of Peter's Paradise will shine  
On these, and make those gardens  
mine.

which means a general average of about 70%.

As in all other businesses, the few successful must carry the losses of the many unsuccessful books. Nor does there seem to be at the moment much hope of lower costs in production, except for standardized reprints of wide possible circulation for each title, or for the comparatively few books which are guaranteed a wide sale in advance. The best figures indicate that for an edition of 2,500 every economy in production, including paper covers and news-print paper, will not reduce the costs more than 12 cents a copy, and it is highly questionable whether the public will buy more badly made books at, say, \$1.75, than well-made books of the same title at \$2.00.

But books in all probability must come down. Can the percentage of remainders and books that never go beyond their first edition be reduced? We believe so, but this should be remembered: Some waste is essential. If all "speculative" books were refused, the progress of literature would stop. All experimental novels (such as were "Main Street" or "The Bridge of San Luis Rey"), all books not clearly accordant to the present taste of the masses, everything in short but routine "best sellers," would have to be rejected, and this would mean, in our opinion, not only a check upon literary progress, but eventual financial ruin. The standard books of one generation have too often been the experimental books of the one before, the first-fruits of genius of a new and untried author.

But unquestionably the wastage is too high. There are too many disappointing second books published after good first books by young authors, too many mediocre new books taken for fear that another publisher will gobble a new author. An average of 70% of financial failure is too high. And if it were 60% or 50%—if unfortunate titles were reduced that much in number, it is probable that prices might be reduced also. In this, and in possible reduction of labor costs, in better methods of distribution, in some control of authors' advances, in more effective promotion, lie the best hopes. The present price of books results from the circumstances just described, and is justified by them. But it is to be hoped that publishers will find a way to reduce their costs, even though a narrow one. There is no injustice, certainly, in the present price of new books.

### Women and Obscenity

By CHARLES CESTRE

WILL our age be remembered in future histories of the intellectual development of the West for having initiated, as an article published some time ago in this Review suggested, the literature of obscenity? Some of the recent productions of talented authors seem indeed to constitute a faunesque epic of sex, in the most exuberant spirit of the Renaissance, with Rabelaisian plainness, although seldom with Rabelaisian humor. This analysis, to be complete, ought to comprise not only the orgiastic explosion which brings the most secret impulses and gestures of the body into public view, but the broader and more widespread growth of amatory expressionism, which, based upon the bold assumption of the full facts of sexual life, refrains from crude exhibition or brutal nomenclature. This literature—in fact an important part of the novel-production in France, Germany, England, and America today—proceeds from the psychological conception of human behavior prevalent in science and in thought. Morals is no longer a code of compulsory principles taught by religion or enforced by social practice: it is an art of living, which within the elastic boundaries of a vaguely traditional pattern, gives ample scope to individuals to act as they are urged or restrained by their physical or psychical consciousness. Education, in the sense of knowledge or wisdom transmitted by our elders or betters, tends to be replaced by personal experience acquired by direct grappling with reality. The mode of the encounter is determined by the individual writer's needs or inhibitions, with all the mental or emotional reverberations they entail.

Actual life, where many collective taboos still hold good, confines the velleities of the timid and the wary. Few have the pluck to start experiments on their own account. Literature is the free field of tentative living. Fiction writing does not consist so much today in the invention of arresting stories as in the launching of strongly individualistic characters on the great uncharted sea of new life-experience. Passion as sentimental or romantic excitement yields ground to sexual thrill, where "soma" and "psyche" together vibrate in long waves of intense turbulence. Many inchoate novels aim essentially at the massive impact of nerve commotion. Those which rise to the level of art do not neglect spiritual values, but show them intimately connected, through the limbo of the unconscious, with the powerful,

The cut above, a study by Dod Procter, is reproduced from "Thirty Years of British Art," by Sir Joseph Duveen (Boni).

dark stirrings of the organic depths of being. All the contemporary literature of sex rests on physio-psychology. Physio-psychology will help us to understand some of its seeming anomalies or disconcerting ventures.

Is it not startling that a great many of the most daring sex novels are written by women? The women did not usher in the new fashion: but as soon as it was on its way, they rushed forward to join it

and often left the men behind by the boldness of their subjects or the outspokenness of their language. This, at first sight, presents to us a world upside-down.

Civilized countries have traditionally associated woman with notions of modesty and reserve, which even the climax of romantic wildness in the nineteenth century had not destroyed. George Sand's private life, it is true, was a first draft of the full picture offered us by many a heroine of today. But in her work George Sand dealt only with the imaginative or emotional aspects of passion. She raised the first loud cry for the emancipation of woman, but that was, as she wanted it to be construed, a plea for the freedom of the heart. She warily (almost with Victorian

prudence) left in the dark the physical concomitants and consequents of passionate rebellion. Her epoch did not yet admit the tearing of the veil that convention and decency had drawn over the nakedness of the body. How superannuated her timidity in the light of the modern enfranchisement! Women writers nowadays would find it ridiculous or humiliating to shun risqué scenes; they show a predilection for



### This Week

"MAGIC AND MYSTERY IN TIBET."  
Reviewed by FRANCIS YEATS-BROWN.

"SAMUEL BUTLER."  
Reviewed by GEORGE MOREBY ACKLOM.

"WAR DEBTS AND PROSPERITY."  
Reviewed by J. A. M. DE SANCHEZ.

"OPIUM."  
Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN.

"FLOWERING WILDERNESS."  
Reviewed by HOMER E. WOODBRIDGE.

"HUMAN BEING."  
Reviewed by R. N. LINSOTT.

UPPER BROADWAY.  
By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

"BATH."  
Reviewed by WILMARTH LEWIS.

### Next Week, or Later

"ENGLAND UNDER QUEEN ANNE."  
Reviewed by PHILIP GUEDALLA.

subjects that call for them or introduce materials that Flaubert or Beaulreire would have shrunk from. Innumerable novels are hardly concealed confidences of women who broke the marriage tie with gusto in order to enrich their sensual experience; of girls who ran the round of dizzy adventures, prodigal of their personal treasures in order to treasure up luscious fruits; of co-eds learned in jolly rides and moonshine parties; of disciples of Sappho seeking in the Great White Way a reflection of the resplendent sky of Greece. Colette's mastery in *arte amatoria* has roused in Anglo-Saxondom many an emulatrix of her knowingness and fame, who did not always deal in the secrets of the bedchamber with her delicacy of touch and subtle power of indirect expression.

How is it that so many troubling books on touchy subjects have been written by women? Physio-psychology explains it. Not only does the empire exerted by the new science over the minds account for the boldness of the writers to enter its field and the eagerness of the readers to be taken into it; it helps to understand the part played by women novelists at the turning of the literary tide. It is the most potent factor of the great change wrought in the mental complexion of women within the last thirty years, if not as regards moral and social behavior, at any rate as regards their attitude towards self-expression in creative writing.

Let us guard against confusing literature with life. Art is not penned within the narrow paling which cramps everyday existence, submitted, even in the present reign of greater freedom, to the compelling power of public opinion and moral tradition. Actual conduct, when it swerves from the beaten track, is threatened by penalties, more or less hard to avoid, that are the possible consequences in the physical or mental order of the laws of human nature or the conditions of collective life. These binding necessities in the realm of action call for an attempt to break away from them in fiction. Literature means

facts, a limited range of experience, a thin store of sensations may be expanded to a boundless world of exhilaration and tumult. There, a skilful writer may figure out in glowing colors the potentialities of life; a bold writer may throw a challenge to the meanness of ordinary circumstances. Of late, this cry of defiance has taken the form of an appeal to sex—not seldom uttered by women writers.

If we except two or three male protagonists, the women have been the least hampered by considerations of social decorum, the least embarrassed by personal feelings of bashfulness. The reasons that may be brought forward in explanation have to be traced to physio-psychology. In the light of this new science, the attitude of women towards sex appears to be characterized by a duality fundamental in their nature. Woman is capable of both more passion and more self-composure than her partner. Her passion is of the heart; her composure is of the flesh. One may exist independently of the other; or, if synchronous, may act independently of the other. Not so with man. A man in love is carried away by an intensity of imaginative fleshliness, which invests the body of the loved one with a resplendent glow. There is an element of religion in his passion, akin to the sacred fury of the primitive worshippers met by Seabrook in the African jungle. Not only the feelings, but the gestures of love, for him, are bathed in an atmosphere of mixed thrill and awe. In this sense it may be said that prudishness as an obstacle to be overcome at the climax of passion, is properly the creation of the male imagination and sensibility.

Whatever the idealism of woman, it assumes a more general, more diffused quality. Love, for her, may be admiring, affectionate, maternal, as removed from mating as a child's infatuation for a little friend. This represents one phase of the emotional life of woman, the more common, that which prevails under ordinary circumstances. The other, more specific—which belongs to exceptional moments of

throbbing agitation and becomes, recollected in tranquillity, the essential factor of creative writing—is often accompanied in woman with a marked self-possession, which enables her to take in the matter-of-factness of the situation even under the sway of passionate feelings. Barring the extreme case of amorous coldness recently described by a French novelist as "flesh at the freezing point," there is always for the woman, in matters of sex, an element of clear-sighted coolness. Conception, for her, is instinctively associated with child-bearing and childbirth, and assumes something of medical preciseness. Caresses, somehow, unconsciously insert themselves, in her mind, into a chapter of gynecology. This inclines women writers, when they approach the subject of sex in the modern spirit, to take what I should call the technical attitude. While male writers, even when they affect a show of cynicism, inevitably remain idealistic and under the influence of some sort of mystic ecstasy—with all that goes with it of tremor and shamefacedness—women can be deliberate and plain, as unromantic towards sex as an engineer in the service of a submarine cable company towards the poetry of the sea; or a biologist, dissecting a coral animal, towards the sheen of the gem. Autobiographical confessions (always, of course, more or less garbled) or detached observations, owing to this faculty of self-division, assume the same categoric, we might say, almost professional tone. There is no limit to outspokenness, because the original passionate stir vanishes before the unimpassioned mood of impartial scrutiny. A naturalist transcribing notes from a card catalogue has no qualms. Women can face the troublesome problems of sex in the spirit of the card catalogue compiler.

Women writers are entirely conscious, when concocting these books, of the effect they will produce. Male readers are temperamentally little fitted to remain unmoved in presence of the bold revelations brought forth in "Wells of Loneliness," "Parables of Virgins" and other "61"

compunction, which are the privilege of trained specialists. The public at large is violently shocked or interestingly scared: both results secure success. The pruriency of Puritans may be a thing of the past; but there remains for the majority of half-emancipated Christians (those in whose veins, to use the phrase of a French writer, still runs the "Syrian virus") an embarrassment with regard to the openly displayed facts of sex, which creates a delightful mixture of eagerness and recoil. Nothing is more apt to urge them to raid the special corner of bookshops. The exquisite inner turmoil, in the reader's minds, is the greater as the most unafraid characters, in sex novels, are generally women. It is a mistake to believe that the ordinary rule of reticence and restraint obtains for the liberated type of woman—but it is a prevalent mistake.

Sex novels, viewed in the light of physio-psychology, justify in many cases their daring and novelty by disclosing some important secret workings of the human mind. The passionate flights of the feelings were described, with unparalleled beauty, by the romanticists. The sensations connected with the obscure or repressed disturbances of love are just beginning to be observed and recorded. Women writers play their part in unveiling the strange elements that enter into the making of passion. This disclosure creates a movement of unquiet curiosity. Great changes in the general mind begin that way. When the first flutter of emotion has abated, the relative importance of the sex motive will be more justly estimated. Excitement will calm down. Women writers, losing their exceptional position as specialized exponents of themselves and their kind, will take their normal rank among the great phalanx of those who strive, with mind open to the whole world of psychology, to entertain and enlighten their contemporaries concerning the Self in all its aspects, with a due sense of the balance of the human faculties.

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TIBETAN PRAYING WALL.

Specially drawn for the *Saturday Review* by Hendrik Van Loon.

### Midst Tibetan Snows

MAGIC AND MYSTERY IN TIBET. By ALEXANDRA DAVID-NEEL. New York: Claude Kendall. 1932. \$3.75.

Reviewed by F. YEATS-BROWN

MADAME ALEXANDRA DAVID-NEEL is not sufficiently well known among students of mysticism in the United States and Europe. She has travelled far and seen much, and her experiences are not only intellectual but physical: indeed there is no white man or woman who has had a similar practical experience of the Tantrik and other mystical practices of the Tibetans, whereby that strange race seeks to probe the secrets of the Self.

Her book must therefore be approached with respect. An uninformed reader might view it with suspicion, so strange are the ceremonies described, so fantastic the tales of lamas who can sit naked through a whole bitter winter night of a Hima-

land with a culture that considers itself superior to that of India and Europe. The author has met the Tashi and Dalai Lamas, she has conversed with sages in every stage of emancipation, she has assisted at the mystic banquet at which the initiate offers his flesh to the devils of materialism, she has witnessed the weird Chöd ceremony with its drums made from human skin and trumpets made from thigh-bones, and she is as much at home sitting crosslegged with a lama, drinking tea made from liquid butter, as she would be in a villa in the South of France. It is this meeting of East and West in her pages that gives the book its particular attraction.

As regards the literary method, Madame David-Neel sometimes falls between two stools: she is not technical enough to satisfy the student who knows, for instance, of the attribution surrounding the mystic syllables *Om mani padme hum*, and not autobiographical enough to

miles as if treading on air, and yet others who perform the terrible rites by which a corpse may be revived. But Madame David-Neel has either done or seen these things herself; she brings to them the sympathy of a Buddhist of long standing and profound erudition, combined with a truly French acuity of vision. She makes no miraculous claims for the psychic phenomena which she has witnessed; she has observed everything in a free and impartial spirit, unbiased by doctrine or dogma, yet not tied down and blinded by the Western love for exact categories.

Her first "retreat" was carried out in a hermitage near Shigatze:

It was springtime in the cloudy Himalayas. Nine hundred feet below my cave rhododendrons blossomed. I climbed barren mountain tops. Long tramps led me to desolate valleys studded with translucent lakes. Solitude, solitude! Mind and senses develop their sensibility in this contemplative life made up of continual observations and reflections. Does one become a visionary, or rather, is it not that one has been blind until then?

The current idea in the West that absolute solitude leads to brain disorders is a fallacy, according to the author. Isolation may have a bad effect on prisoners in solitary confinement (as indeed it has) and on lighthouse guards, explorers, and other individuals who have not sought for "the aristocratic gift" of privacy, but this does not apply to Tibetan hermits.

Words cannot convey the almost voluptuous sweetness of the feeling experienced when one closes the door of one's hermitage, or when one looks down from the heights at the first wintry snow heaping up in the lower valleys, creating for months around the hermitage an impassable white and cold rampart. But most likely only those who have lived through it themselves can understand the irresistible attraction that hermit life exerts on many Orientals.

Madame David-Neel makes us feel this attraction, makes us realize also that Tibet is not the bleak and savage country it is sometimes represented to be, but a

she had materialized a familiar spirit who became so close and real to her that not only could she see and touch him, but others saw him, she tells us that she decided to dismiss him, and that "it took six months hard work." What kind of work? Did the spirit haunt her? What did she talk to it about? We long to know more, yet perhaps it is ungenerous to criticize when we have been given so much which is of real interest and importance.

"Magic and Mystery in Tibet" is only an instalment of a larger and completer work in which the religions of Tibet will be described in detail. Let us hope that the author will not be too reticent about her own experiences and ideas, even if these are not directly related to lamaistic practices. The world has need of travellers and thinkers like Madame Alexandra David-Neel, and need of books like this which represent *choses vues* not as Loti did (inimitably) under the glamor of personal romance, or in the manner of best-seller adventure writers, seeking out every sensation to tickle the palate of a jaded and sedentary public, but without any artifice beyond that of a heart attuned to the customs of a distant people.

I have read many books on Tibet; but this one gives me, between the lines at any rate, more than any other, a feeling of those intangibles and imponderables which make up an "atmosphere," and which are better worth knowing than most facts. I would recommend this and the other works of Madame David-Neel to students of Eastern philosophy in particular, and to lovers of adventure in general.

Francis Yeats-Brown, author of "Lives of a Bengal Lancer" and "Bloody Years," is an Englishman who during long residence in India became thoroughly familiar not only with the country and the people but also with Yoga discipline.

A Bible is to be the first prize in a Parisian lottery. It contains the signature of King Francis I. of France.