

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY



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JUSSERAND WITH THEODORE ROOSEVELT IN PARIS, 1910  
Photo by Rol, Paris. Copy furnished by Roosevelt Memorial Association, Inc.

### This Virtue

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933. \$2.50.

THE WINDING STAIR AND OTHER POEMS. By William Butler Yeats. The Macmillan Company, 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

Away south upon another mountain a medieval tower, with no building near nor any sign of life, rose into the clouds. I saw suddenly in the mind's eye an old man, erect and a little gaunt, standing in the door of the tower, while about him broke a windy light. He was the poet who had at last, because he had done so much for the word's sake, come to share in the dignity of the saint. He had hidden nothing of himself, but he had taken care of "that dignity . . . the perfection of form . . . this lofty and severe quality . . . this virtue." And though he had sought it for the word's sake, or for a woman's praise, it had come at last into his body and his mind.

THAT is from among the "Discoveries" of William Butler Yeats, in "The Cutting of an Agate," and it defines him for me, though it was written about another. It is out of his distinguished prose, but you will find the same quality all through his "Collected Poems," the definition emerging more and more clearly in the work of his maturity. In the early work, in the front of the book, appears the young Yeats who, as he has told us, "took from Allingham and Walsh their passion for country spiritism, and from Ferguson his pleasure in heroic legend, and while seeing all in the light of European literature found my symbols of expression in Ireland." In "Hodos Chameliontos" he says:

I thought that for a time I could rhyme of love, calling it *The Rose*, because of the Rose's double meaning; of a fisherman who "had never a crack" in his heart; of an old woman complaining of the idleness of the young, or of some cheerful fiddler, all those things that "popular poets" write of, but that I must some day—on that day when the gates began to open—become difficult or obscure . . . I plunged without a clue into a labyrinth of images. . . .

There is much about the mystical Rose in Yeats's earlier poetry, there are in the background "the huge white creatures" that haunt "The Wanderings of Oisín," there is Niamh of the "triumphing arms" who summons some of the enchantments  
(Continued on following page)

### The Autobiography of a Great Diplomat

WHAT ME BEFELL. *The Reminiscences of J. J. Jusserand.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1933. \$4.

Reviewed by FRANK H. SIMONDS

WITH the death of Jules Jusserand there disappeared one of the last—perhaps the very last—of those in whom there still survived the spirit of seventeenth century France. For even in the confusion of the World War and the chaos of the post-war era, this French diplomat, within himself, still lived the life of a great age, of the Augustan Age of French literature.

If, however, he was in thought and feeling rather a man of letters than a servant of diplomacy, nevertheless Jusserand, with the two Cambons and Barrère, belonged to that group which before and after 1914 was responsible for no small fraction of the great and decisive victory which the French cause achieved in the public opinion of mankind. And, today, long after the event, most informed Germans would agree that the first great disaster of their country was not upon the battlefield of the Marne but in the diplomatic preface to actual conflict.

In Washington, where for nearly a quarter of a century Jusserand was a familiar and a notable figure, he earned two superlatives. He was not only, beyond dispute, the best ambassador France ever sent to the American capital but also the most sincere friend the United States ever had among French diplomatic representatives. Indeed, of all the distinguished line of foreign representatives come to our shores from Europe, only James Bryce has compared with Jusserand alike in understanding of Americans and in affection for the country to which he was accredited.

Over Jusserand's grave, too, his fellow-countrymen, who unhappily have as yet appreciated his service too little, should set the inscription "He kept us out of propaganda." For that after all was Jusserand's supreme service to France during the war and the difficult years which followed. At the very foundation of his policy was the double conviction that traditional American friendship for France  
(Continued on page 351)

## Santayana at Seventy

BY IRWIN EDMAN

WHEN a great figure in contemporary thought and letters reaches the age of seventy, the occasion seems appropriate to an estimate of his work. The life is happily not over and, in the case of Mr. Santayana, there is as to finish of style, acuteness of analysis, and intellectual passion not the slightest evidence of diminution of power. There are passages in his most recent volume\* that are as freshly incisive and as alert to winds of doctrine, ancient and modern, as any that he has ever written. But by the time a man has reached seventy the lineaments of his thought are fixed and the kind of place he has made for himself in contemporary opinion has become reasonably clear. One cannot have the last word. Even if one were conceivably authorized to speak for one's generation, posterity will always have something later, possibly different, and certainly more complete to say. Perhaps a seventieth birthday is not the occasion for an estimate at all but, especially in the case of a thinker so much an artist as is George Santayana, merely a time for celebration, for a festive inventory of his gifts.

It is the variety and strange union of these gifts, like the union of his Catholic sympathies with his pagan thought, and his Spanish upbringing with his English speech, that serve, for all his acknowledged distinction, to leave some ambiguity as to just where Mr. Santayana's greatest distinction lies and in just what realm he is to be placed among the writers or the thinkers of our generation. For his reputation derives in no small measure, and in some respects suffers, from the fact that he is so intransigent an artist. He himself gives evidence, especially in his later speculative works, of wishing his arguments to be taken on their logical merits and for their accent of truth. Yet even where he is dealing with such complicated technical issues as the status of essences and the nature of a datum, he cannot avoid the perfect cadence and the image at once glamorous and distracting in its beauty. Lovers of literature are enchanted (and it is a good guess that they always will be) by a prose as supple and picturesque, as musical and as just as exists in our time. Professional philosophers have been disturbed ever since Mr. Santayana began to write by precisely these excellences. How could one argue with this exquisite rise and fall or refute or be quite sure one understood propositions that always had the suggestive overtones of poetry, and terms that set the mind to dreaming rather than to dialectic? How was one to classify a philosopher who would not use the language or the apparatus of the schools and who could dispose of whole schools of thought, past and present, with some elegant irony that the victims were too clumsy to combat? How could one deal with a thinker gifted with so much dramatic sympathy for all human perspectives that he would with very few exceptions not state even his own positions too literally, and had the quiet audacity to treat other doctrines, however prosaic in expression, as, like his own, soliloquies illustrating the poetizing mind of man?

It would be both banal and impertinent at this late date to insist too much upon

Mr. Santayana's rank as a stylist. Even, perhaps especially, those who quarrel with him as a philosopher (or who cannot understand his philosophy) have long conceded or revelled in his language. And if space permitted, one would like to examine the constituents of his peculiar magic as a literary artist, or better still to quote from his rich treasury of aphorisms. No writer, save possibly Emerson, is more generous with them. And in such an anthology selected from his works as Logan Pearsall Smith's "Little Essays Drawn from the Works of George Santayana," this gift for the sentence that distills a life, an argument, or an adoration, becomes unmistakable. One does not need to have these jewels in their setting to note the brilliance with which each of them shines. One would like to examine the way in which adjectives that seem merely a surface felicity, serve really to carry on the argument, while the reader is pausing over their flagrant charm. In describing, for instance, the degeneration of the humanistic tradition, he writes, "Humanism thus ended at last in a pensive agnosticism and a charmed culture, as in the person of Matthew Arnold." It is one of the most subtle of passages in the "Sweetness and light" that has ever been made.

But it is not the persuasion—or the distraction—of his prose style alone that has created some confusion and indecision on the part of his critics. Nor is it the fact that he long ago published a sonnet sequence which, despite his assertion that "in the magic sense," he is no poet, is generally ranked as a classic in American literature. Perplexity arises from something deeper than the fact that his prose is poetical and that he is a poet. What puzzles the literal-minded, however much it may delight the imaginative, is the circumstance that his whole approach to philosophy is (for all his more recent involvement in some of the more professorial issues) that of a poet. We have his own statement on that theme in his "Three Philosophical Poets"—his studies of Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe:

In philosophy itself investigation and reasoning are only preparatory and servile parts, means to an end. They termi-

## This Week

NOW I AM CLEAN OF SUMMER  
By FRANCES FROST

THE NAKED MOUNTAIN  
By ELIZABETH KNOWLTON  
Reviewed by Kermit Roosevelt

ENGLAND'S ELIZABETH  
By MILTON WALDMAN  
Reviewed by William Huse Dunham, Jr.

NOT GUILTY!  
By FRED D. PASLEY  
Reviewed by William Jay Hoff

MORE DREAMS  
By STELLA BENSON

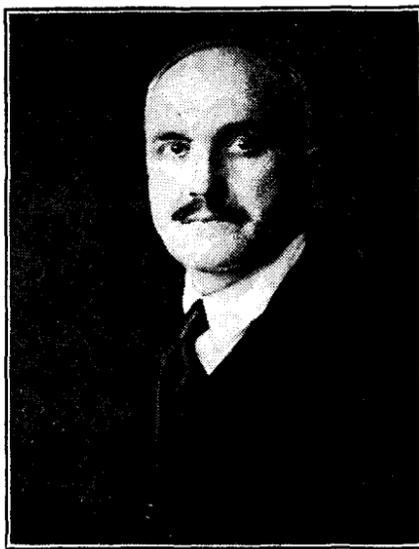
ASSAY, 1933  
By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Next Week or Later  
CLARENCE EDMUND STEDMAN  
By CHAUNCEY B. TINKER

\* SOME TURNS OF THOUGHT IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY. By George Santayana. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933. \$1.75.

nate in insight, or what in the noblest sense of the word may be called theory—a steady contemplation of all things in their order and worth. Such contemplation is imaginative. No one can reach it who has not enlarged his mind and tamed his heart. A philosopher who attains it is for that moment a poet, and a poet who turns his practised and passionate imagination on the order of all things, or on anything in the light of the whole, is for that moment a philosopher.

His treatment of philosophy, that is to say, of the panoramas of philosophies, like his consideration of religions, is that of the sensitive student and connoisseur of the variety of the flowerings of human imagination. He treats all creeds, however dogmatic their pretensions, and all systems, however literal their ambitions, as languages, differing in expressive of the impulses and needs and aspirations of men. He traverses the history of thought as the history of human expression on the gravest and most central of human themes, life, nature, and destiny. He follows each with romantic sympathy and respects the insight, the perspective, and the eloquence of each. But just as he says religion is literally false and poetically true, so, too, with philosophy. The philosopher is the intellectual poet of the race, just as "religions are the fairy tales of the conscience." This approach to philosophy makes him a critic at once appreciative and skeptical. There is no one who can write with more cogency on other people's versions of truth. But in the midst of following these systematized dreams in their own terms, he always implies and sometimes expressly says that they are fictions, true as a lyric may be true to the heart and the intention of a poet, but not by any means unimpeachable transcripts of an absolute reality. He is a transcendentalist in the sense that he can at will take the point of view of any philosophy. But he never forgets nor does he let the reader forget that a point of view is only a point of view and a human perspective is not the universe in the movement of which that point of view arises. This very gift of sympathy with all religions and all



GEORGE SANTAYANA

a memorial and a guide to the forces of man in nature.

He is a naturalist, who sees that the most lyric flights of poetry and thought have an animal origin and depend on mechanical conditions. He insists that under whatever sky he had been born (since it would have been the same sky) he would have had the same philosophy. But this common sense belief in the world of birth and death, of doing and suffering, of wars and rumors of wars, of stones and stars, has of late been obscured to many readers by the growing attention he has paid to the "realm of essence," his playing over those eternal forms, which swim into the ken of consciousness, his concern with the "spiritual life," which to him is the play of sense and thought upon these bodiless essences, which are esthetically, immediately, and logically what they are to the intuition that beholds them. For despite his obeisance to the realm of matter, despite his unwavering naturalism, his later books have seemed to celebrate particularly the intuition of timeless essences, and to speak the language of Plato rather than that of Lucretius and Darwin. The apparent inconsis-

as well as the morally serious have born wondered how far this interpretation of philosophy—and religion—was going. Were all perspectives equally true and equally false? Was Santayana giving his own version, however delicate and glorified, of pragmatism? Was the truth simply that fiction which gratified your own soul, that lyric cry the mere uttering of which gave peace?

There is a core of common sense in the heart of this philosopher-poet, a common sense, incidentally, to which he has discovered it necessary repeatedly to recall his readers. He himself speaks of "the touch of sympathy with splendid error" bred in him by long familiarity with philosophy and religion. But ironic skeptic though he so often and so characteristically is, and convincing as are his arguments for skepticism, he has never entertained any real doubts about "nature," or matter, nor does he think it necessary or possible to prove their existence. They are matters of "animal faith." Our assurance of them lies in our movements, our actions, and our devourings. Philosophies and religions and poetry are lyric expressions. But "lyric experience and literary psychology as I have learned to conceive them, are chapters in the life of one race of animals in one corner of the natural world." Mr. Santayana has a dramatic, almost a romantic feeling for all systems of feeling and thought, and at the same time a disillusioned questioning of them all. He has an even more radical skepticism, skepticism as to fact, nature, history, and the self. So far as knowledge is concerned, all we are given is "the solipsism of the living moment," the immediate intuition of what he calls an Essence. Out of these essences given in sense and thought he "composes the silly home-poetry in which [he talks to himself] about everything."

All is a tale told if not by an idiot, at least by a dreamer; but it is far from signifying nothing. Knowledge accordingly remains always a part of imagination in its terms and in its seat; yet by virtue of its origin and intent it becomes

cadec abroad—is not the arrogance or contempt it is sometimes interpreted to be. In "Character and Opinion in America" and in "The Genteel Tradition at Bay," he has said things that were no less biting for the elegance of their expression. But critics much more flattering have often shown far less appreciation of the good will, the energy, the possible beauty in a civilization whose worst defects are its impetuosity and its youth.

His irony and his attachment have indeed served rather specially to accent the value of Santayana as a corrective and an anodyne. He seems to speak out of a great tradition, and, for all his alertness to what is being said and thought in the world, to be looking at our time and indeed all times under the form of eternity. That sense of the setting of the temporal in its true setting of the timeless derives partly from his metaphysics. But it derives even more profoundly from his education. For he is, though he calls himself "an ignorant man, almost a poet," an epitome of European culture. His books have about them the atmosphere, the stamp of the whole patrimony of the past. Aristotle gave him his naturalism and Plato the metaphors for his ideals. Though, of late, he has taken to arguing points like the professor he has always hated and long ceased to be, he speaks still for the most part in the capacity of a humane and cultivated man of the world—of the world of thought and imagination. He belongs in two halls of fame, that of philosophy in the strict and narrower sense of that term, and in the tradition of humane letters. He is most comparable to Matthew Arnold, save that he is Matthew Arnold with a Latin wit and a philosophical equipment. Long after the professors have ceased to quarrel with some of the nicer points of his late epistemology, he will be read by the readers of the wise. His wisdom will endure, because it cleaves so closely to that of the Greeks, and whatever details of his thinking may be rendered anachronistic, his writing has the assured immortality of a beauty marmoreal and pure.

beautiful phrases, there is the vagueness of a deeply poetic yet intellectually immature gift. This may be illustrated by a verse from "The Sorrow of Love" as it stands in "The Poetical Works of William B. Yeats" first printed in America in 1906:

The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,  
The full round moon and the star-laden sky,  
And the loud song of the ever-singing leaves,  
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

How this is transformed in the new "Collected Poems"! We read:

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,  
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

How much better that is—how much more precise, how instinct with acute observation, rather than vague with dream! The cutting of the agate has been learned. The mature poet can even return to his early work and evolve a new sharply-faceted poem from nebulous stuff.

A quarter of a century after the Yeats of "Down by the Salley Gardens" we were made aware of the stride he had taken when his superb "Responsibilities" was published. Four years before that, in "The Green Helmet," "Against Unworthy

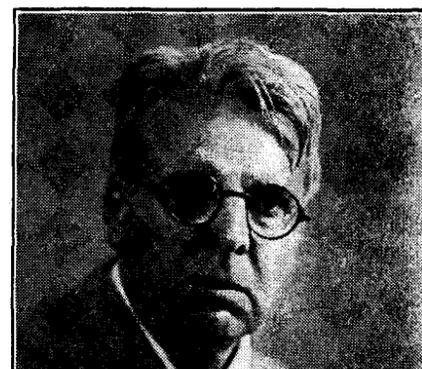
Praise," "The Fascination of What's Difficult," and "All Things Can Tempt Me," he had roused us anew:

O heart, be at peace, because  
Nor knave nor dolt can break  
What's not for their applause,  
Being for a woman's sake.  
Enough if the work has seemed,  
So did she your strength renew,  
A dream that a lion had dreamed  
Till the wilderness cried aloud,  
A secret between you two,  
Between the proud and the proud.

Stripped verse, a marvellously certain accent, emotion in the grasp of a master "In dreams begins responsibility," he quoted on the flyleaf of the book of 1914, but through dream he had advanced beyond dream, and through the experience of a great human love, sure to be salted with invigorating bitterness,—yes, and through noble strife with the mob spirit, all too ready blindly to rend what it cannot understand.

Bred to a harder thing  
Than Triumph, turn away  
And like a laughing string  
Whereon mad fingers play  
Amid a place of stone,  
Be secret and exult,  
Because of all things known  
That is most difficult.

So Yeats came to stature in the year of the Great War. Since the war, he has given us "The Wild Swans at Coole," "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," and more recently "The Tower," and "The Winding Stair." I see him, though not yet,



WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

certainly, an old man, "standing in the door of the tower, while about him breaks a windy light." He has "hidden nothing of himself," he has maintained "this lofty and severe quality . . . this virtue," in spite of all his long public life, of all the battering of the incessant years.

There is no book of poetry more worthy of your attention than this record in verse of the life of one of the great ones of this age. The accomplished artist is here, the adept in spiritual mysteries, the scholar with wisdom as well as learning. The gates have opened long since, but the poet has become neither difficult nor obscure. In the second section of "Blood and the Moon" he declares

this tower is my symbol; I declare  
This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill  
of a stair is my ancestral stair;  
That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley  
and Burke have travelled there.

"Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire," he cries, nor have nobler words been spoken in our time.

## Now I Am Clean of Summer

By FRANCES FROST

Now I am clean of summer and my leaves  
and naked lean upon the icy air,  
knowing the dissolution of sweet griefs  
and that the smallest joy survives nowhere;  
contained and harsh, I bear the frozen storm  
and gusts of sun with equal irony,  
enduring skies perversely kind and warm,  
and steady gales, as does the winter's tree.

But dammed within and deep, are fiercely hid  
the strong rains of my being's certainty  
which will persist although no spring shall bid  
them rise to buds and pointed ecstasy.  
Around this love I shall forever give  
I stand me sealed, and though I die, I live!