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## BRITISH AUTHORS



Richard Church

*Howard Coster*

# BRITISH AUTHORS

A Twentieth-Century Gallery

with 53 Portraits

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RICHARD CHURCH

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS book gives miniature word-portraits, or cameos, of modern British authors. They were originally chosen, with consideration for the interests and preferences shown by readers in other countries, upon a basis of overseas sales. That tends to make the book an annotated guide for the reader abroad; a guide catering for all tastes, and making no formal discrimination by literary standards. I have thus been relieved from a responsibility from which I might well shrink. To have to choose from the strong army which has been upholding the standard of English literature during the past half-century! It is a frightening thought, even for a detached professional critic; still more for one who himself is one of that army struggling in creative effort, and therefore armed maladroitly for the task of selection, because of this own idiosyncrasy, prejudice, fervours; those demons from which no writer is free.

The difficulty of choice having been got over in this rough and ready way, the next thing to assume was that those readers in all parts of the world would want to know more about these authors in whom they were already interested. It is this desire which I have tried to satisfy.

My method has been to state, within the short space permissible, what I believe to be the outstanding qualities in the writer, and how they are demonstrated in his work. So far as is possible, I have tried to keep a sense of proportion by hinting at some sort of statuary relationship between the authors, and at the background from which they have been dragged. The justice of this method is obviously limited. Having been forced to sit in judgment, I have tried to dismiss any conscious bias. As for unconscious bias, which can never be dismissed, I can only point out that this element is constant throughout the book, and gives it a certain unity. Readers will, I hope, disagree with it in one instance, and emphasize it in another, when they have studied the bibliographies following my cameos, and have read the books listed therein. Healthy disagreement about an author is a sign that there is life in his work. It also suggests that there is life in the critics.

I mentioned the background from which these writers have been stepped up. It is a background so vast, so rich, so infinitely varied, that one can only greet the newcomer with the words, "Help yourself". That is the process by which Aladdin was introduced to the treasure-cave. The English language, the source of all this wealth, is comparable to the ancient Greek tongue in its combination of

## INTRODUCTION

range and subtlety. Its enormous vocabulary, gathered from the rhythmic delight of the Greek, the succinct economy of the Latin, the warm earthiness of the Anglo-Saxon, with a dozen other and later flavourings from Europe and the East, and a latter-day peppering-up from the speech of our American cousins, gives British writers an almost embarrassing birthright. We suffer from that wealth. "Eliminate! Eliminate!" was the constant cry of Robert Louis Stevenson to all aspirants.

Of the writers discussed in this book, some have welcomed that embarrassment of riches in their native tongue. Winston S. Churchill, Walter de la Mare, Hilaire Belloc, J. G. Frazer, for example, are modern writers who accept its possibilities for rhetoric, for grand organ music. Others select a violinful of sound. Some, such as W. H. Hudson, hush it to a whisper, almost, of self-communication. I might enlarge infinitely upon the various manipulations of it, even by these few writers. But readers should find out these things for themselves, so that the examples may come to a beautiful life. All that I would urge, however, is that the authors here presented may be accepted not upon my arbitrary judgment but upon the reader's further experience in the wider range of English literature. This would be the task of a lifetime. I will, therefore, recommend for the present purpose two books which might form a useful framework round the present one. They are *A History of English Literature*, by the French critics Legouis and Cazamian, and *The Georgian Literary Scene*, by Frank Swinnerton. Both are admirable in their balance, their sensibility, and their sanity. With these two good guides at hand, and my own brief indications upon the authors at present selected by readers from abroad, I can strike with some confidence upon the entrance of the treasure-cave, and cry "OPEN SESAME!"

RICHARD CHURCH

## THOMAS HARDY

1840-1928

OF the many "regional" writers in English literature, Thomas Hardy may be considered the greatest. The *scene* of his work is his native district of Wessex, which comprises the several counties in the south-west of England, with London at one end and Land's End at the other, with Oxford at the top and Southampton at the base. Within this area of such varied beauty, his rustic characters play their part during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Hardy's simple genius makes their actions and emotions universal. The reader who follows his work through the novels, short stories, and voluminous poetry, will see how this writer fashions the architecture of his work, and especially his novels, on the bold and austere lines of the drama of Æschylus. It is significant that in almost every one of Hardy's fourteen novels, and in a great many of his short stories, as well as in his vast epic-drama *The Dynasts*, the opening scene discloses a road, with human figures progressing along it. Further, a characteristic opening device is for Hardy to prelude this raising of the curtain by a certain cosmic commentary, with astro-nomic references in which the earth is seen as a speck of dust in the heavens. Thus begin two of his noblest pieces of work, *The Dynasts* and *The Return of the Native*.

This device is a direct consequence of his attitude towards life. One can hardly call it a philosophy, nor would he have done so himself. Indeed, his whole concern was to have no label attached to him. He refused to join the Rationalist Press Association, saying that "though I am interested in the Society I feel it to be one which would naturally compose itself rather of writers on philosophy, science, and history, than of writers of imaginative works, whose effects depend largely on detachment. By belonging to a philosophic association, imaginative writers place themselves in this difficulty, that they are misread as propagandist when they mean to be simply artistic and delineative."

Such, however, was the moral stiffness of English society in the Victorian nineties, that Hardy's novels, in spite of their exquisite gentleness of spirit, their rich poetic fullness, and their profound moral outlook, roused a storm of protest which alarmed and

disgusted him. He vowed to write no more novels, and in his later years he expressed his genius through the medium of verse.

But that controversy is now dead. What remains is the vindication by time, the arch-critic, of Hardy's purity of purpose. So deep was his emotional nature that, in order to preserve himself from being crushed in the contact of life, he forced upon himself an attitude of detachment, of almost morbid privacy, from which he looked out on the world like a snail from its shell. This process, a deliberate one, determined the main characteristics of his work, and of his pre-occupations. It is best summed up in words used by Hazlitt in describing the typically English habit of *living to one's-self*. "What I mean by living to one's-self is living in the world, as in it, not of it; it is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one knew it; it is to be a silent spectator of the mighty scene of things, not an object of attention or curiosity in it; to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. It is such a life as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, and such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections."

That aptly describes Hardy's work as a whole. But in detail how much closer, how affectionate, faithful, and idiosyncratic his work is. Its texture, of a rich, formal, and almost Biblical diction, carries the collection of a wide knowledge of nature and of human nature.

His prose and verse are like those old English parish churches which he knew and loved so intimately; formal, often archaic in structure, but with their stone, brick, and oak beams, weathered by our unique climate, stained and mossy, with here a gargoyle, and there an odd quirk of handicraft. Hardy's literary style is soaked in his personality. That personality, too, pervades his characters, both men and women, whose tragedies and country junketings are now a part of our national tradition.

Thomas Hardy, who was born at Dorchester in 1840, was trained as an architect, but soon gave up this practice for that of writing. He published his first book, *Desperate Remedies*, in 1871. His last book (of poems) appeared in 1928, the year of his death.

Which are his best books? The choice is a personal one, according to the taste of the reader. My favourite is *The Woodlanders*. It was his favourite too. The most popular, and the one which instantly brought him wide fame, is *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. *Jude the Obscure*



Painting by Augustus John in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

## THOMAS HARDY

is the novel which created so much scandal in Victorian England. His most ambitious work is *The Dynasts*, an epic-drama with the whole of Europe for its setting, and the drama of the Napoleonic wars for its action.

NOVELS: Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), *Macmillan*; Far From the Madding Crowd (1874), *Macmillan*; The Return of the Native (1878), *Macmillan*; The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), *Macmillan*; The Woodlanders (1887), *Macmillan*; Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), *Macmillan*. SHORT STORIES: Life's Little Ironies (1894), *Macmillan*. PLAY: The Dynasts (1903), *Macmillan*. POEMS: Collected Poems (1934), *Macmillan*; Selected Poems (1940), *Macmillan*.

## W. H. HUDSON

1841-1922

THOUGH W. H. Hudson was of English ancestry (his grandfather came from Devonshire), he was not of British birth. His parents emigrated from the United States to the Argentine, where he was born in 1841, ten miles from Buenos Aires. His subsequent life and work, therefore, offer another tribute, along with those of Joseph Conrad, to the spirit of England. In 1868, on the death of his father, Hudson came to England and never left it again. He was naturalized in 1900, and died in London in 1922 at the age of eighty-one.

His early life in a farm-house on the pampas of Argentina is told in one of the most beautiful books of its kind in the English language, *Far Away and Long Ago*. It is the story of a seeker after solitude, a habit engendered partly by temperament and partly by a sick body. Stricken by rheumatic fever, he was unable to become a farmer. For years he "idled" at home, wandering about the pampas and making notes of its wild life. His powers of observation were thus abnormally developed. In particular he watched birds; but in this pursuit he trained himself, by passion rather than by discipline, to notice everything else that was happening or not happening around him. He made a habit of merging himself, silent as a stone, into his environment,

so that his presence caused no interruption of the comings and goings of wild creatures. So acute was his scrutiny, and so intensely



was its record scored upon his memory, that he was able to write his autobiographical study of childhood nearly sixty years afterwards during an illness while he was lying in bed at Brighton. It was the task of a few weeks, yet it is a book full of detail, local colour, and an atmosphere that comes upon the reader's heart with an almost desperate nostalgia. The picture of the farm-house, with its one great tree, the annual clouds of thistledown blown by the trade winds; the flocks of flamingo rising on blush-coloured pinions above the

*Yours sincerely  
W. H. Hudson*

marshes; such scenes remain in the mind, set there by the simple magic of Hudson's prose.

That book, being a reminiscence, was also something of a statement of his philosophy. He was a man who loved the earth and all that was in it. In his more benign moments he could even love his fellow-men—and their dogs. But that was less often. His normal state of mind is summed up in the following words. "When I hear people say they have not found the world and life so agreeable and interesting as to be in love with it, or that they look with equanimity to its end, I am apt to think they have never been properly alive nor seen with clear vision the world they think so meanly of, or anything in it—not a blade of grass. . . . In my worst times, when I was compelled to exist shut out from nature in London for long periods,



sick and poor and friendless, I could yet always feel that it was infinitely better to be than not to be."

That was always his creed and his plan of life. He remained sick and poor to the end. Indeed, the Government had to give him a pension of £150 a year in his old age, and this, with a lump sum of £2,000 from J. M. Dent, the publisher of his last books, supported him at the end. The English public, though urged by enthusiastic critics, refused to buy his books. They seemed always to be sufficiently un-topical, or of remote things in remote places, or small things in small places, and worthy of neglect. After his death, however, the public suddenly began to appreciate what the discerning critics (among them Edward Garnett) had been praising for a generation past. His books began to sell. To-day they sell in increasing numbers, even his rather uncongenial efforts in romantic fiction, *The Purple Land* and *Green Mansions*.

*Green Mansions*, an animistic romance set in South America, contains a character called Rima, half maiden, half dryad. The memorial to Hudson in Hyde Park took the form of a bird-bath, surmounted by a sculpture of Rima by Jacob Epstein. The work found notoriety, and thus the quiet genius of Hudson is most widely known in England through an entirely irrelevant controversy relating to a not very convincing character from one of his least representative books.

He is best represented, of course, by his direct writings about nature, and especially about bird life in England and South America. No other writer, not even Gilbert White, the naturalist, has his gift of presenting the various qualities of birds so that the reader becomes, along with the writer, an excited but disciplined watcher. In addition, Hudson, through his clear, water-like prose, adds a verbal beauty to the scene that sets it forever in an amber of poetry. As an example of this singular quality of Hudson's work I would recommend *A Shepherd's Life*, published in 1910. In my view this is his most perfect and most characteristic book. It introduces a warmer element of human nature into work that sometimes can be accused of a pantheistic remoteness and even antagonism. It presents by quiet discussion upon the present scene of Wiltshire a history of mankind that goes back to the days of the Stone Age. And that is a characteristic panorama of Wiltshire. Finally, the death of the old shepherd, with his head resting against the lap of his wife, is one of the most simple and pathetic scenes in English literature. It reveals that, after all, Hudson's solitariness enabled him to see mankind against a vast background, and from that vision to satisfy his own soul.

NOVELS: *The Purple Land* (1885), *Duckworth*; *Green Mansions* (1904), *Duckworth*. COUNTRY LIFE: *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893), *Dent*; *Nature in Downland* (1900), *Dent*; *Afoot in England* (1909), *Dent*; *A Shepherd's Life* (1910), *Dent (Everyman)*; *A Hind in Richmond Park* (1922), *Dent (Everyman)*. LETTERS: *Letters to Edward Garnett* (1925), *Dent*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918), *Dent (Everyman)*. SELECTIONS: *An Anthology of W. H. Hudson* (1924), *Dent*.

## ROBERT BRIDGES

1844-1930

HOLDING the official position of Poet Laureate from 1913 to his death in 1930, Robert Bridges was an unblemished example of a kind of English literary figure which changing social conditions tend to make more and more rare. Born to ample fortune, educated at Eton and Oxford, he was able to keep himself removed from the hurly-burly of wage-earning, and to look about him at leisure before choosing his vocation in life. He practised for some years as a physician, but finding his interest in literature more possessive than that in medicine, he retired to his study in his home near Oxford, where, surrounded by a happy family in an atmosphere of culture and intellectual enthusiasm, he spent the rest of his days. His son, Sir Edward, is Secretary of the Treasury and Head of the British Civil Service. His daughter, Elizabeth Daryush, is a poet of exquisite sensibility.

For the majority of his life Bridges's poetry was unknown to the general public. Writing at a time when taste had become florid and sugary, his austere, water-clear verse had an appeal only to the few. His appointment as Laureate was made by a Prime Minister of equal intellectual aristocracy, Mr. Asquith.

The essence of Bridges's work is dignity. A shy man, difficult in temper, somewhat over-bred in matters of literary taste (he thought John Keats rather a vulgar fellow), he believed that his vocation of poet should be duly respected. There is a legend that once, during the luncheon rush-hour, he entered an omnibus in the centre of Oxford, sat down, and put his feet on the adjoining seat, while other people had to stand. Upon the conductor expostulating, he replied with hauteur, "If this sort of thing goes on, I shall take a taxi!"

That temper he carried into his literary life, with advantageous results. The beauty of his work, especially his shorter lyrics, is of chiselled marble. His poems read like gems from the Greek



Oil painting by Charles Furse

ROBERT BRIDGES

Anthology. They have a morning-glory light about them, as though they were minted in the Golden Age before the smoke of industrialism fogged the air we breathe. All his life Bridges worked in this atmosphere of clarity and pure instinct. By reason of his environment and his heritage, he cloaked himself in theories, and sheltered behind a philosophy of refined taste rather than of deliberate and fecund thought. His political position was that of a noble-natured professor, disliking contact with the mob, but wishing it well, and being capable of indignation on its behalf. In his last work, published six months before his death, he said much about the economic inequalities of society, but his views were picturesque, rather than deeply felt.

“Thus, when in London City a Guild of merchants dine,  
one dinner’s cost would ease a whole bye-street of want,  
its broken meats outface Christ’s thrifty miracle.”

This poem, a Lucretian epic written in loose hexameters (unusual in English verse) was called *The Testament of Beauty*, and was a best-seller both in England and America. It is full of most delightful southern English landscapes, in the manner of our traditional water-colourists. In effect, it states that Reason is not enough; austere, spartan-trained taste and intuition must be the guide of the individual, and the *monitor* for social conduct. And beauty must be the food of that good taste. One of his earlier lyrics, written before he was famous, sums up the whole attitude upon which his life and work were articulated.

“I love all beauteous things,  
I seek and adore them;  
God hath no better praise,  
And man in his hasty days  
Is honoured for them.

“I too will something make  
And joy in the making;  
Altho’ to-morrow it seem  
Like the empty words of a dream  
Remembered on waking.”

POEMS: Poetical Works (1912), *O.U.P.* 6 vols.; *The testament of Beauty* (1929), *O.U.P.* ANTHOLOGY: *The Spirit of Man* (1916), *Longmans*.

## R. B. CUNNINGHAM GRAHAM

1852-1936

ROBERT BONTINE CUNNINGHAM GRAHAM was one of the most astonishing figures I have ever met. Very tall, thin, upright, his head thrown back so that the full light of the sun revealed it as a Velasquez portrait, he quite hypnotized me. I looked to each side of him, expecting to see Rosinante, his horse. I looked for the spear of his chivalry, and for the barber's basin. Absurd things to look for in the place where I was introduced to him, outside the Office of Works in St. James's Park! At his side, instead of Rosinante, stood the sculptor Jacob Epstein, smiling blandly. Cunningham Graham towered above this companion, his eyes fierce and accusatory. But their fire was mitigated by a tissue of fine wrinkles, the record of a life of humorous contemplation, and a secret, almost permanent, smile. His manner was of great kindness and courtesy; one would hardly dare to use the word charm.

I have never forgotten that short encounter, and the conversation, though it took place so many years ago. The man's personality was so uncontemporary that the encounter had upon me the effect of being suddenly transplanted some three centuries back in history. The experience would have been frightening had it not been so exhilarating. He affected other people similarly. Bernard Shaw has given an account of his reaction to Cunningham Graham in a prose picture attached to the play *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Who was this strange reincarnation from the Renaissance world of soldier-adventurers?

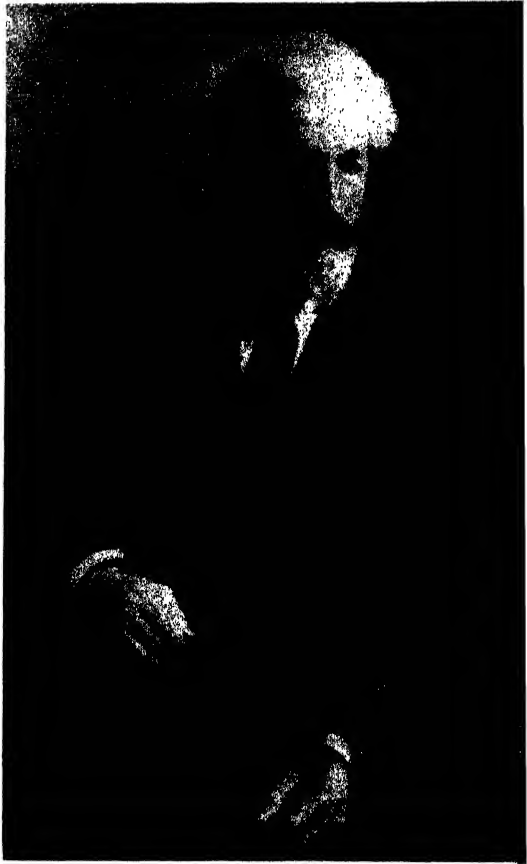
He was born in 1852, into an ancient Scottish aristocratic family. After the usual education of his class, he became what he called a Socialist, but what should more accurately be called an Anarchist. He believed human society and its civilization to be a poor, soft development; a degeneration from the primitive state of the noble savage. He tried to give it an edge, and for some years took an active part in politics. He sat in Parliament from 1886 to 1892, what-time he tried to clear his inherited estates from their mortgage of a hundred thousand pounds. He was one of the pioneers of the Labour Movement in England when that movement was still picturesque and unfettered by statistical science. But he grew disgusted with his vain effort, while the public remained suspicious of his originality, that quality which is seldom an asset in politics.

Following the call of his Spanish blood (his grandmother was

Spanish) he set out on an errantry all over the world with a specialization in desert places and lands where the living was hard and dangerous. Disguised as a Turkish doctor, he sought to reach a forbidden city in Morocco. He explored the fever coasts of Africa. But principally he lived in South America, among the gauchos, where his superb horsemanship won him an honoured reputation as a *caballero*. Tschiffely, the famous horseman, has written a biography, *Don Roberto*, which emphasizes this aspect of his character.

But it is his own writings which win him a place here, as a figure unique in British letters as his person was unique in modern British society.

As writer and man he is comparable only to the Victorian figure, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, also an aristocrat, a rebel, a *petulengro*, and a poet. Cunningham Graham disdained the labours of literature, and thus he remained an amateur without major or sustained work to his name. But his essays and travel books are superb. The man shines through them, proud, ironic, odd, and frequently fierce in the true Arabian way. He speaks of God being unapproachable, except by prayer, "that smoke the human mind gives off under its fire of cares". The savage criticism of human nature latent in that phrase characterizes all his writing, of which the best is his book *Mogreb-el-Aksa* (Morocco the Most Holy). His aloofness, his aristocratic manner, have kept popularity at bay. But he will always be a particular delight to the few who cherish dignity and fastidiousness both in human character and in letters.



Rodeo

R. B. CUNNINGHAM GRAHAM

ESSAYS AND STORIES: *Thirteen Stories* (1900), *Duckworth*; *Success* (1902), *Duckworth*; *Scottish Stories* (1914), *Duckworth*; *Thirty Tales and Sketches*. TRAVEL: *Mogreb-el-Acksa* (1898). BIOGRAPHY: *Doughty Deeds* (1925), *Heinemann*; *Portrait of a Dictator* (1933); *The Horses of the Conquest* (1930). ANTHOLOGY: *Rodeo* (1932).

JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

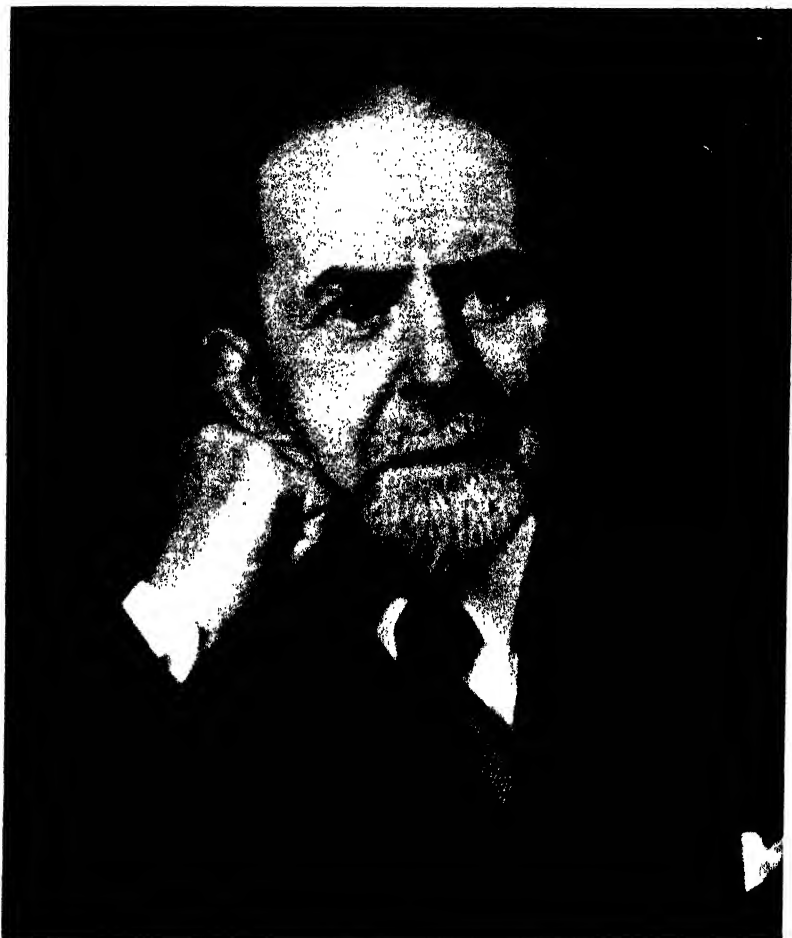
1854-1931

It is a singular matter for thought that the two outstanding British savants of modern times, the two men whose generalizations upon their vast acquirement of knowledge have set the whole of mankind upon new paths of scientific inquiry, possessed also that literary grace which was able to make their work popular. Darwin, with his *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, published in 1859, and Frazer, with his *Golden Bough*, published in 1890, set new periods to the whole trend of human thought. At the same time, each added a classic to our literature.

*The Golden Bough*, with its vast range of evidence, has so affected the study of comparative religions, folklore, anthropology, and even ethics and psychology, that we are inclined to accept its pervading influence as having existed for ages past. Yet Frazer lived and worked on into the decade which ended with the outbreak of the 1939-45 war, carrying his load of scholarship through those strange interim years of false peace, a serene spirit amid the breaking-down of civil and scholastic standards, a master to whom the lucid methods and exquisitely formal mode of expression of the eighteenth century were congenial.

Born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1854, he spent his youth in Helensburgh, in a scene described by him in a collection of prose pieces written in old age. This book, *The Gorgon's Head*, is prefaced with a tribute from Anatole France. The young Scot went with a scholarship from Glasgow University to Cambridge. He qualified for the Bar, and lived in the Middle Temple; but I believe his only practice during that time was in chemistry and physics. Influenced by his friend Robertson Smith, the authority in Semitic matters, he turned to anthropology, collating his research upon a philosophical framework which he based upon the principles of Herbert Spencer. But how different he was from that mentor, that irritable mechanic of the mind, excluding with ear-pads all the sensuous instruction which

JAMES GEORGE FRAZER



*Vandyk*

life might offer. Frazer had the quick senses of a poet, auxiliaries ever alert to enrich his scientific investigation, and to give it form, significance, and fecundity. The most exciting quality of his work is its power of stimulating the imagination of the reader and urging him to a like process with the author; that of gathering together different facts so that each sheds light upon the other and the phenomenon gradually unifies into the normal.

Frazer did not neglect his classical studies, and the acquiring of languages, for his main purpose was essentially a poetic one, although



his methods must need to be scientific. It was from the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid* that he took the title for his *magnum opus*. Aeneas, wishing to visit the underworld, was told that its queen required a gift, a golden bough (the mistletoe), plucked from a certain tree in the sacred grove of Diana. This myth held for Frazer a thousand problems; such as the origin of priesthood, of kingship, the idea of Diana the chaste being worshipped as the goddess of fertility. As originally published, *The Golden Bough* was in two volumes. Already it had explored the mysteries of religion, magic, superstition, mythology, and tribal customs. For this it ranged over the great civilizations and the most primitive societies. As a younger worker in the same field described it, the book was one in which "the marble forms of legend and myth are made to lend their beauty to the crude and queer customs of the savage and the uncouth usages of the peasant, while the Gods and Heroes of Olympus receive in exchange the vitalizing breath of life and reality from their humbler yet more animate counterparts."

That two-way process goes on through the whole of Frazer's vast life-work. Later, *The Golden Bough* grew from two to twelve volumes, so that admiring critics even dared to joke about it and call it *The Golden Banyan*. Frazer, by giving his life to the exploration of the significance of a sprig of mistletoe, gave that life also a unity of purpose which is awe-inspiring. I recollect him in his old age, sitting half-blind, a frail, small, yet regal figure, his face parchment white, his nose chiselled finely under the first frosts of approaching death. Scientists, artists, scholars, poets were paying tribute to him on his seventy-fifth birthday. There he sat, loaded with honours from his own country and from the rest of the world. Yet that imaginary sprig of mistletoe was the greatest symbol of them all.

Most of his great works can be obtained by the general reader in abridged editions. I would recommend especially the single volume edition of *The Golden Bough*, and the short selection of studies from his monumental edition of the journey of Pausanias through Greece during the second century A.D. In this latter book it is the commentary that matters, as indeed it is with most of his books.

ANTHROPOLOGY: *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915), *Macmillan*, 13 vols.; *Abridged Edition*; *Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion* (1933), *Macmillan*, 3 vols. PHILOSOPHY: *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory* (1930), *Macmillan*. SELECTIONS: *Greece and Rome* (1937), *Macmillan*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *The Gorgon's Head* (1927).

## OSCAR WILDE

1856-1900

THE difference between the European and the English estimates of Wilde's work is only one of the comic things which marked that man's unhappy life. Abroad, Byron and Wilde are two of the outstanding figures in English literature. In England, the work of both has been damned by the perversions of character that drove both men into exile. In spite of that, each has been the figurehead of a movement; Byron of a great movement, Wilde of a petty one.

Here is not the place to discuss Wilde's life. Sufficient to say that he ruined that life by allowing vanity and an unrealistic defiance to challenge the public opinion that had been outraged by his conduct. He might have saved himself; but he preferred to pose as a martyr. This craving for the centre of the stage marked a self-consciousness which he had cultivated all his life, and elevated to a fine art. There has hardly been a more discomfiting writer in English literature. Even when he was a broken man, cast out by society and driven into exile after his disgrace, the book which he wrote, *De Profundis*, still gives the lie to its title. It is still animated by that self-consciousness which shows the author in a pose of self-pity rather than sincere remorse and humility.

This characteristic, however, was not entirely due to the man. The times in which he lived had much to do with it. Born in 1856 in Ireland, he matured through a period when industrialism was making the British public more and more philistine. Commercial success was debasing our standards of culture and stereotyping our moral values. Art could not stand the strain imposed by the first essays in machine mass production. It was an age of ugliness in almost every sphere of life. In various ways writers rebelled. Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds pointed one way, the æsthetic, which feverishly set out to divorce art from life. Oscar Wilde was their disciple, and he carried their principles to an extravagant practice. His natural gift as a writer and conversationalist made him so successful that he became a spoiled darling. His art for art's sake crusade, with its *fin de siècle* theories that elevated dilettantism into a virtue, was not unfairly derided in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*. The core of that movement, however, was more dangerous than it seemed, and the public instinctively reacted in a way that made Wilde look like a butterfly on the wheel, with the result that there had been a backrush of sentimental feeling about him and his

OSCAR WILDE



*Ellis & Walery*

work. He preached that art is a greater discipline than morality; a dangerous form of pseudo-mysticism, leading to such disorders in society as we are cursed with to-day.

But in Wilde's time, and in his career, it remained merely picturesque, until he put his foot through the picture and touched reality. Then he was destroyed.

His work survives, however. I believe this is due to three qualities

## OSCAR WILDE

which it possesses; brilliant wit, a sense of the theatre, and an Irish shrewdness.

His wit has become a legend. Examples of it remain pressed in books, flowers of yesteryear; like them, a ghost of itself, with the fragrance and the colour only hinted at. The shrewdness underlying that wit emerged also in his criticism of life and letters, which was penetrating rather than profound. For he had not much sustaining power. What self-conscious person has? This affected his style as a playwright, making the points scored by him *mots d'esprit* rather than *mots de situation*. In his finest comedy for the stage, however, he blended the two so perfectly that the play, *The Importance of being Earnest*, is worthy of being compared with the plays of Congreve and Goldsmith. But it loses in the comparison. Once again the self-consciousness and insincerity show through. In one of his poems he has a line, a highly artficed line, which confesses, or purports to confess, that "I have found the lover's crown of myrtle better than the poet's crown of bays." One feels that no sooner had the curtain fallen after this utterance, than the actor tossed both crowns into the wings with a gesture of petulance. Yet even so, he put those words into practice, and courted disaster.

PLAYS: *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *Methuen*; *Salomé* (1893), *Methuen*; *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), *Methuen*. FICTION: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *De Profundis* (posthumous), *Methuen*; *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898). SELECTIONS: *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* (1930), *Dent (Everyman)*.

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

b. 1856

It is, perhaps, an absurdity to introduce Shaw as a British writer. He is as universal as Tolstoi. Like H. G. Wells, his fellow field-marshal in the army of ideas, he is self-educated. He went to work at the age of fifteen, in his native city of Dublin. In 1872, a year later, he came to London with his mother and two sisters. His mother taught music, and Shaw began to teach the English, a task at which he has been unremitting ever since. Fed on Karl Marx, and warmed by his early friendship with Sidney Webb, Edward Carpenter, and

the Shelleyan enthusiasts led by Henry Salt, he soon learned to arm himself formidably for the long war against British *laissez-faire*, narrow-mindedness, vested interests, flesh-eating, and general philistinism toward the arts, the sciences, and life as a whole. He went into the fight determined to do without the aid of Darwinism, the theory of "natural selection", and all the mighty armoury gathered under that banner. At the back of his doctrine has always lurked a strain of temperamental faith in the efficacy of breed. It is, after all, a gesture of mysticism, to call poverty "a crime". Shaw feels that in his blood. His lifelong gesture has been one of extreme fastidiousness; physical, mental, and moral. His asceticism may be carbolic rather than Catholic, but it has been no less active and determinant for that. It found a dogma in the writings of Nietzsche, and a technical expression from the plays of Ibsen.

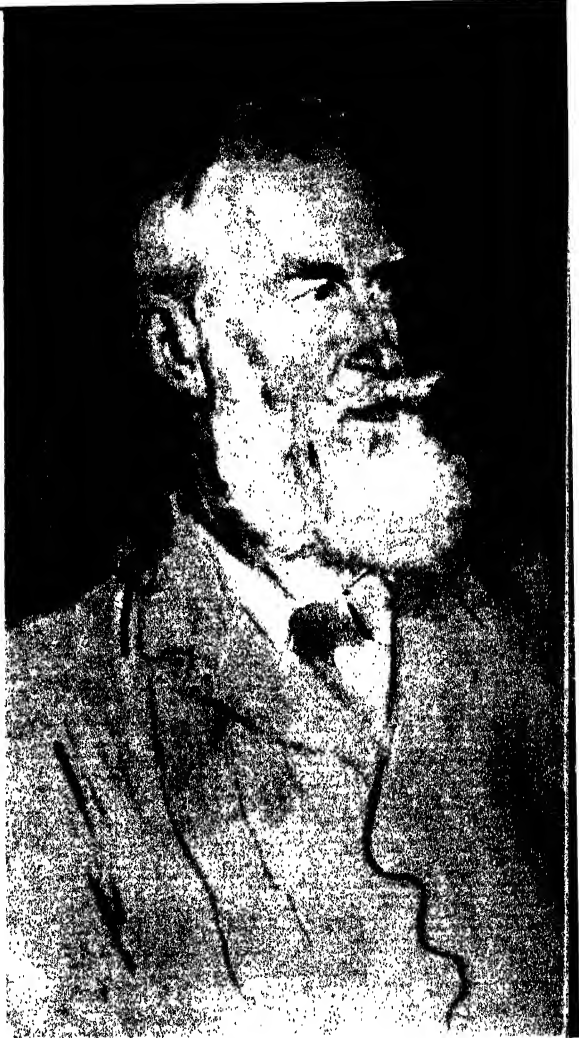
Thus equipped, and so early in life given a direction, Shaw set out to put the world to rights. He began with a few novels which were not published. Then he became a professional critic, of art, of music, and finally of drama. His methods were startling, as can be seen from the volumes of his collected studies in the arts, and his two books, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) and *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), in which the stage and music are used as vehicles for him to convey his beliefs, or rather his instincts, towards an eugenic perfectibility of the human race, and a purgation from that race of all emotional (especially sexual) aberration.

From precept he turned to practice. The years of moral and social disintegration following the Boer War gave him his opportunity. With the aid of the newly established Stage Society, and afterwards in a more commercial way through the management and production of J. E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker, his first plays appeared. *John Bull's Other Island*, produced during the first decade of the century, when the Irish problem was in the front of the political arena, carried Shaw from the close world of the intelligentsia to the open one of the general public. He was now famous. That fame has never diminished. He has mocked that public, whipped it with scorn and cold Irish derision, accused it of complacency and stupid sentimentalism, ridiculed its foibles and traditions. But his most savage audacities have never made it lose its temper with him. He has remained an idol, in spite of the fact that much of his teaching has been accepted and incorporated into the life of the nation. A prophet whose foretellings have come true is usually more than ever without honour in his own country, but this is not so with Shaw.

His life-work is enormous. It was crowned in 1925 by the Nobel Prize for Literature (he used the money to found the Anglo-Swedish Society). In addition to his indirect political activity, mainly through the Fabian Society, he has been an untiring journalist. He is among the greatest public speakers and debaters of our time. The charm of his Irish voice, the rapier-like speed of his repartee, the laughter and clear logic working simultaneously, combine to give his oratory a power that is already legendary.

But the platform and the soapbox have never been wide enough for his power of debate. He had to carry it over into the theatre, and in so doing he broke into a field that was moribund. Ideas, new, topical, yet universal, flooded the stage, and for years the English theatre, so far as it was progressive at all, *was* Shaw.

He brought more than ideas to it, however. Shaw may scoff at fantasy, and the elusive qualities of poetry. But the clarity of his prose style, and the dance and sparkle of his dialogue, are the very



Mansell

Bernard Shaw, from a painting by Augustus John

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

voice of poetry. Further, there occur in his plays moments when the argument becomes incandescent, and throws a ray of light into regions of the soul far beyond the comprehension of the logical mind. The weird agony of Captain Shotover (in *Heartbreak House*), Julius Cæsar trysting by moonlight between the paws of the Sphinx, the Devil's Disciple at the foot of the gallows, these are only three examples of that ultra-mental illumination by which we know Shaw to have been guided all his life, as surely as any genius of religious vocation, or any artist of the most exalted claim to being inspired from without. Shaw, the apostle of clear-minded reasoning, is such by the light of his own rare genius.

PLAYS: *Arms and the Man* (1898), *Constable*; *Candida* (1898), *Constable*; *The Devil's Disciple* (1901), *Constable*; *Cæsar and Cleopatra* (1901), *Constable*; *Man and Superman* (1903), *Constable*; *John Bull's Other Island* (1907), *Constable*; *Major Barbara* (1907), *Constable*; *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1911), *Constable*; *Androcles and the Lion* (1913), *Constable*; *Pygmalion* (1913), *Constable*; *Heartbreak House* (1917), *Constable*; *Back to Methuselah* (1921), *Constable*; *St. Joan* (1912), *Constable*, with *The Apple Cart* (1930).  
PREFACES: *Collected Prefaces* (1934).

## JOSEPH CONRAD

1857-1924

IN his life, and in his work, Joseph Conrad paid one of the greatest tributes ever offered to the spirit of Britain. By birth he was a Pole of aristocratic origin, his name being Korzeniowski. His father, a Liberal in sentiment, got into trouble with the Czarist régime, and was exiled with his young family. The consequent hardships caused both parents to die when the future novelist was twelve years old. A highly intelligent and sensitive child, he realized the cause of this tragic family life. For years he brooded upon it, seeking about in his young soul for a means of escape. Then in 1873, when he was sixteen years of age, he first saw the sea at Venice. This experience, following upon a precocious reading of English books, crystallized the earlier resentment and sense of outrage. Suddenly he saw a means of escape to freedom. The silent forests of Poland, dark and sinister; the tyranny that crushed its people; these were of his past.

## JOSEPH CONRAD

His future must be represented by two opposite forces: the sea, for light and movement; England for justice and freedom.

Thus began a course of action carefully planned and determined. Five years later Conrad, the young Mittel-European, was a sailor before the mast on an English ship. Three years passed, and then he was second mate. His voyages gave him an intimate knowledge of the East and particularly of the Malay islands and seas. On one of his voyages (as first mate) back from Australia on the famous sailing ship *Torrens*, John Galsworthy was a passenger. Encouraged by the professional writer's friendship, Conrad left the sea in 1893 and settled in England.

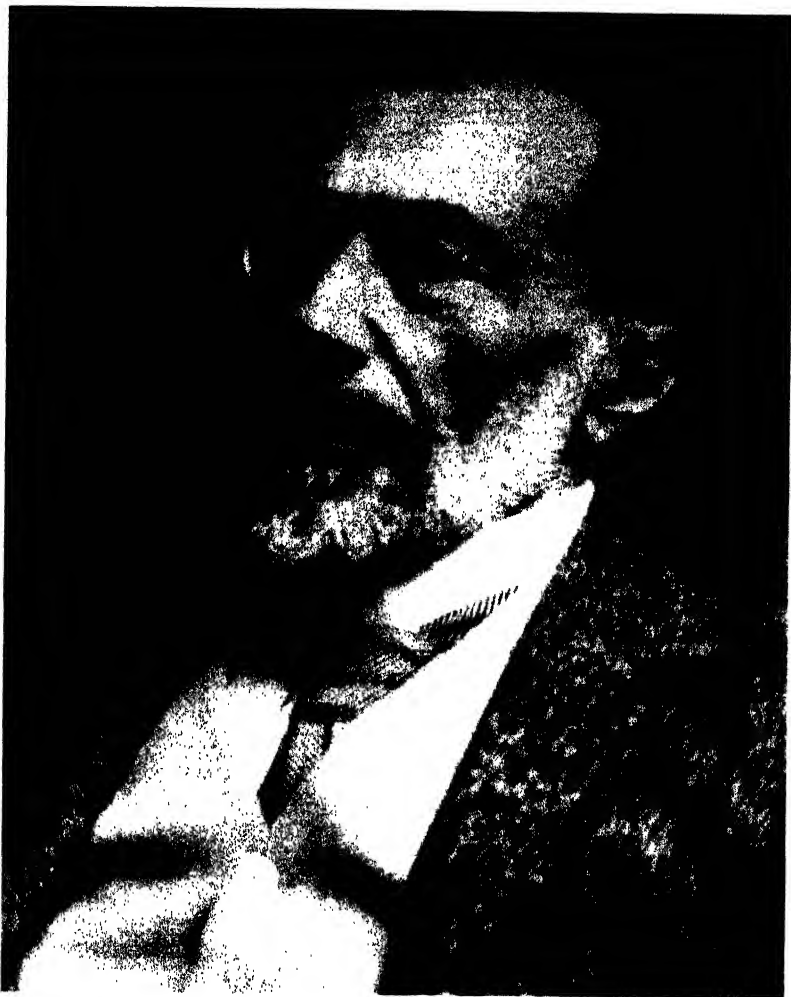
There he met Edward Garnett, the publisher's reader who had reported favourably on his first book and was instrumental in getting it published. Thus began another useful and influential friendship, for Garnett (famous for his discoveries of literary talent) not only helped him in the technique of writing, he also introduced him to other writers, notably Henry James, W. H. Hudson, and Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford Madox Ford). With the last author, Conrad subsequently collaborated in two books.

The influence of Henry James is evident in Conrad's tendency to elaborate methods of narration. I think it probable that he might have found himself more easily and with less mental agony, had he not walked into the web of that great literary spinner. Not content with writing in English, a language which to the end of his life he spoke with a foreign accent, and which he always wrote with a certain self-consciousness that gave his prose an overlaid quality, he must also plague himself with a machinery by which he told many of his tales through the mind and mouth of an old sea-captain named Marlow. This old man is a symbol and a focus-point. He sums up Conrad's past as a mariner, and acts as a reservoir of the vast range of experiences which Conrad gathered before he began to write. Further, Marlow, slow and ruminatory, served to hold back Conrad's poetic urgency, and by laconically dealing out the tale piecemeal, also kept it to earth. But always the author rebelled against this self-imposed discipline, and again and again the reader is suddenly swept up on a blaze of passionate, poetic temper that over-inflates the narrative, blurs the characters, but adds greatly to the atmospheric richness of the work, giving it a dimension and a significance neither Polish nor English, but Olympian.

*Almayer's Folly*, with its sequel *An Outcast of the Islands*, is set in the Malay Islands. These early books are immature, but deeply



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laden with emotional force and local colour. More controlled work followed, and Conrad was quickly recognized by English critics as a writer of genius. But the public, here and in America, did not accept his work until in 1914 he published a short novel *Chance*. Then, after fifteen years of struggle and poverty, he was suddenly a best-seller, and from that time his books sold steadily. After his death in 1924, there was a lull in public interest in his work, its stately and romantic realism being out of fashion during the post-war years of bright cynicism. But to-day, its subtlety of mood, range

## JOSEPH CONRAD

of knowledge and experience, its poetic richness (so astonishing in one who works in the medium of a foreign language); these qualities appear to be authorizing for Conrad's work a position amid that which we acknowledge as the permanent glory of English literature. It is mere chance that he should have written mainly about the sea. His concern is with the human soul, in its moments of greatest solitude and struggle with the forces of evil. "Those who read me," he said, "know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, amongst others, on the idea of Fidelity."

That fidelity, dramatized in pride and an exquisite reserve; is the genius of his work.

NOVELS: *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *Dent*; *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896); *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1898); *Lord Jim* (1900), *Dent* (*Everyman*); *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), *Dent*; *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Methuen*; *Chance* (1914), *Methuen*; *Victory* (1915), *Methuen*; *The Arrow of Gold* (1919); *Rescue* (1920), *Dent*; *Typhoon* (1903).

## A. E. HOUSMAN

1859-1936

THIS poet, whose personality was so incisive and odd that it has already become a legend, was born in 1859 in a village in Worcestershire, his father being a solicitor in the neighbouring town. Housman early showed signs of an inclination for scholarship, and he went to Oxford with the intention of taking an Honours Degree in Classics, the first step to a career as a Latinist. He failed in his examination, and for the time being had to enter the Civil Service, a depressing step for a man of spirit and unique ambition. His failure was due to causes which have never been explained. The effect on him was lifelong. Spiritually, he became a hermit, a Diogenes, in spite of the fact that by continuing his research into Latin literature he was offered the Professorship of Latin, first at London University and later at Cambridge. Continental scholars have acclaimed him as the greatest Latinist of his age. That may be so, but it is not of importance here.

During his years of early manhood as a Civil Servant he wrote a book of poems, which he published at his own expense under the title of "The Shropshire Lad". It was singled out by the leading

critics, gradually began to sell, and is now a classic of English literature. In spite of this success, he refused to produce more poetry, and not until 1922, twenty-six years later, did he consent to publish "Last Poems". These two little collections, with one added in the year of his death, 1936, edited by his brother, Laurence Housman, under the title of "More Poems", are all that remain to uphold the great reputation built up during his life.

Housman may be likened to a quince: a hard, astringent fruit, with a concentrated flavour, somewhat restricted in appeal. Few English poets have had less to say than Housman. His verses are an outcry of pain that man is a creature "whose name is writ in water". His pagan mind saw only one chance of immortality; that of work left behind as a record through time. And he knew that time must always triumph. He shrank from the bitter realization; reserving himself from love and friendship, and casing himself about with a husk of controversial ferocity so that none should penetrate his defences.

It is easy to attack such an attitude. The critic might point out that Housman was after all a protected darling of the gods living in a pedant's paradise; his reclusiveness a condition that is no longer possible. But Housman always forestalled criticism. His restriction, his austerity, the monotony of theme in his verse, are all self-recognized in these words with which he declined the honoured post of Public Orator at Cambridge. "You none of you have any notion what a slow and barren mind I have, nor what a trouble composition is to me (in prose I mean: poetry is either easy or impossible)."

Whether that barrenness was due to overweening pride, or to some deeper mystery of personality, one would hesitate to assert; but it is obvious that a man who refuses public honours because "you should be welcome to praise me, if you did not praise one another", demands a standard of isolated perfection which he could hardly dare to allow even himself to claim. And he was not interested in lesser achievement. In the wilderness of life he wanted to cultivate one or two perfect blossoms; but even in the most intoxicating moments of this ambition, he knew that

"The stinging nettle only  
Will still be found to stand;  
The numberless, the lonely,  
The thronger of the land,  
The leaf that hurts the hand.



**Drawing by Francis Dodd**

A. E. HOUSMAN

“It thrives, come sun, come showers,  
Blow east, blow west it springs;  
It peoples towns, and towers  
Above the courts of kings,  
And touch it and it stings.”

From all three of his books, poems may be quoted to illustrate how successful he was in his aim to cultivate few but good. Combining something of the quality of Heine with that of Matthew Arnold, he added an astringency of his own. Here is an example, his now famous “Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries”.

“These, in the day when heaven was falling,  
The hour when earth’s foundations fled,  
Followed their mercenary calling  
And took their wages and are dead.

“Their shoulders held the sky suspended;  
They stood, and earth’s foundations stay;  
What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.”

POEMS: *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), *Richards*; *Last Poems* (1922), *Richards*; *More Poems* (1936), *Cape*; *Collected Poems* (1939), *Cape*. CRITICAL STUDIES: *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933), *C.U.P.*

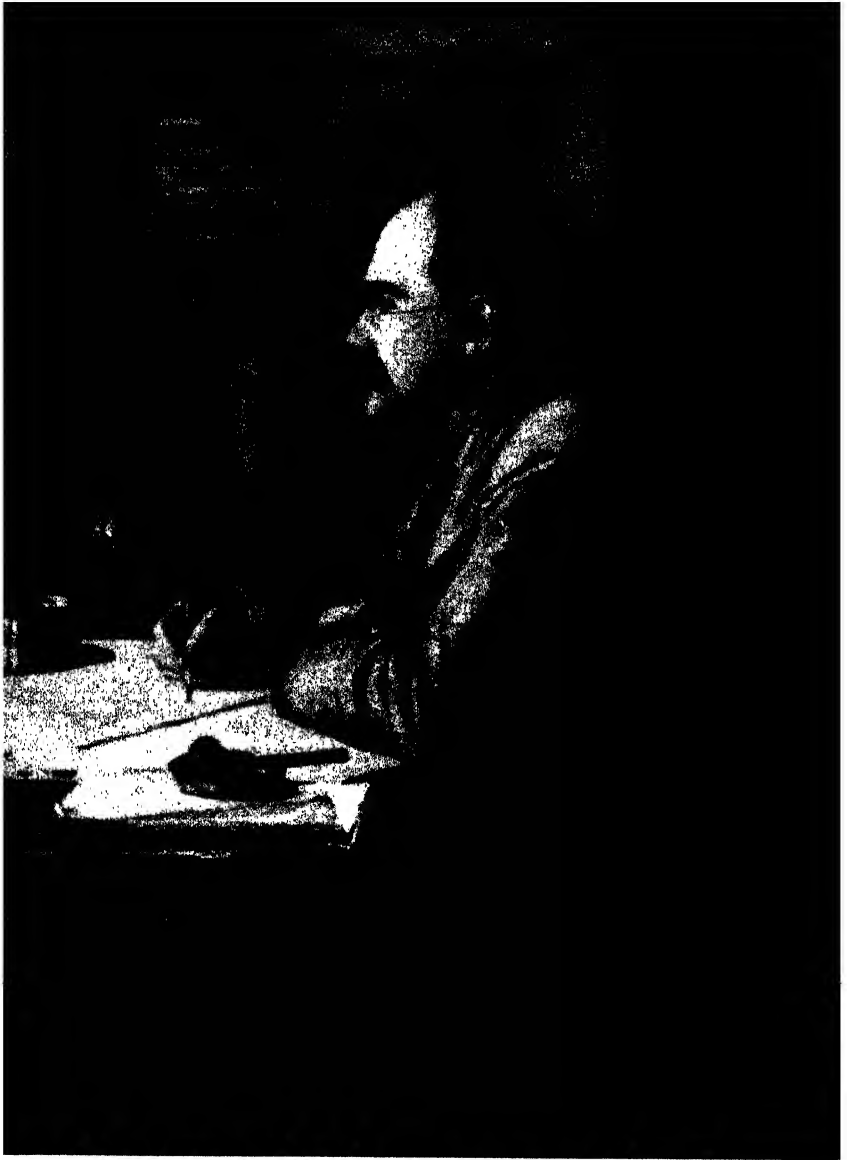
## RUDYARD KIPLING

1865-1936

THROUGH the pattern of the British literary scene during the last half-century, the scarlet thread of Rudyard Kipling can be traced. For some readers, it disturbs that pattern by its stridency. For many more, it is that touch of red which, as in Corot's pictures, lifts and concentrates the colour scheme. Like or dislike it, there it is, representing a certain aspect, a certain temper of our history and our national character.

At first sight, so vigorous and assertive is this colour, that appreciation of Kipling's contribution appears to be a simple matter. Let us first look at this dominant, and qualify our impression afterwards. To understand this most obvious quality, we have to recall that Kipling was a special sort of Britisher, one of that rather isolated brand known as Anglo-Indian. By reason of their isolation in a vast country which has never ceased to bewilder them, these people—for self-protection—have held on madly to an ultra-patriotism. Kipling constituted himself the spokesman of that sectional emotion. Born in 1865 he matured through a period when that emotion was at its strongest, and threatened to contaminate the outlook of the whole British world. Blatant imperialism shouted with a loud voice round the turn of the century. The voice was Kipling's.

It adopted various means. First, it yelled in numbers, for the numbers came. Mr. T. S. Eliot, our most fastidious contemporary critic, has recently examined those numbers, and his conclusion is one that is likely to remain as a comprehensive and sound judgment. He believes that Kipling is a great writer of verse, but only infrequently a writer of poetry. The difference is one which is still arousing comment from the pundits in Britain. Briefly, we may distinguish the two by saying that Kipling's verse nearly always interests the reader because of its subject matter. The expression is journalistic, crude, elementary. The music is that of a brass band or a barrel-organ. That much of this verse is written in army slang of the 'nineties only adds to the effect of saloon-bar mechanical music. With this medium, temporarily drowning all competition, Kipling advocated the "White Man's Burden". He sang the slogans of the makers of Empire. To-day, that word Empire has been deleted and Commonwealth of Nations substituted for it. This change of ethical principle, and practice, means amongst other things that most of Kipling's verse is out of date. Apart from its obvious purpose, its



Oil painting by Sir Philip Burne-Jones in the National Portrait Gallery

RUDYARD KIPLING

utility value, it had small merit. The same can be said of much of his other writings in prose. His politics, his partisanship, and racial doctrines belong to a less pleasant, a less dignified phase of British history, one which we hope is gone for ever.

But that is not all of Kipling. It was merely enough to make him the unlaurelled laureate for millions of readers, the most popular writer of several generations. Time is sifting out another element from his work. To account for this, we need to go further back into his origins. His father was an artist (curator of the Lahore Museum). His mother was sister-in-law to Burne-Jones, the æsthetic painter. He was not brought up in an atmosphere of philistinism. Further, he was bound to suffer some reaction from the over-robust attitude which he forced himself to adopt in his more popular and tendentious work. There was a mystical side to him. It took queer forms, and fed on strange food. Read the "English" poems, such as the exquisite *The Way through the Woods*. Read the novel *Kim*, probably his major work. Here is another Kipling; several other Kiplings; creatures of uncertain moods, strange and wayward agonies of spirit, doubts and disillusionments, sometimes of abject self-abasement. But here too is Kipling the true poet and the writer of genius, escaped from the *Barrack Room Ballads*; a master of form, especially of the short story in its more elusive shapes; an artist as temperamental and subtle in his effects as the Russian Tchekhov.

STORIES: *The Light that Failed* (1891), *Macmillan*; *Kim* (1901), *Macmillan*; *The Jungle Books* (1894-5), *Macmillan*; *Captains Courageous* (1896-7), *Macmillan*; *Just So Stories* (1902), *Macmillan*; *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), *Macmillan*; *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), *Macmillan*. SHORT STORIES: *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1890), *Macmillan*; *Actions and Reactions* (1909), *Macmillan*. POEMS: *Departmental Ditties* (1886); *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892), *Methuen*; *Sixty Poems* (1940), *Hodder*; *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (1941), *Faber*.



## H. A. L. FISHER

1865-1940

THIS book, with its cameo portraits of British imaginative literary figures, should not rightly include historians, or scientists, but I am grateful that one or two exceptions have been made. Amongst them are H. A. L. Fisher and G. M. Trevelyan, two historians in the Liberal tradition established by Macaulay and John Richard Green in the nineteenth century.

Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher, O.M., died, as the result of a street accident, in 1940, at the age of seventy-five. To the day of his death he was active in public service, a quiet figure, untainted by the more dubious characteristics which are too often an ingredient of political life. I recollect him as a tall man, thin and ascetic in appearance, gentle of voice and courteous of manner; a figure more suited to the study and the college common-room than to the political platform. It was almost impossible to think of him as taking part in a general election, and making those orations with which the politician seeks to attract voters. Yet Fisher was successful in Parliament and reached Cabinet rank as President of the Board of Education. He was the author of what is known as The Fisher Act, a piece of legislation which, when it shall be put into full practice, will carry our democratic British life several steps toward a fuller consciousness of its freedom, its cultural inheritance, and its dignity.

This great piece of work was no side issue from Fisher's activities. It was an expression of the whole man, his character and his philosophy. Liberalism to-day is wandering in a mist, and its future is problematic. Its virtues are almost completely overlooked. Fisher was an embodiment of those virtues. He belonged to the age of great Victorian scholars and classicists. Such men as Jowett, the formidable and learned Master of Balliol, John Morley, Secretary of State for India, and Sir Otto Trevelyan, the distinguished historian, were of his kind. It is significant that he should have chosen to write, amongst many other revealing works, a life of Lord Bryce, scholar and statesman, and a study of the Whig Historians. It shows the trend of his mind, its traditions, its faiths, its hopes for a European comity evolving out of the Golden Age of Greece, through Imperial Rome, and the humanism of the Renaissance. He lived to see that humanism challenged by the worship of the machine.

The book by which he is popularly known is his *History of Europe*, published in 1935. It is notable for its fine sense of proportion, its

H. A. L. FISHER

well-tempered criticism, and its quiet dignity of style. I quote an example which shows him in his strength and his limitations, which again are those of his traditions and his upbringing. He believed in reason rather than revelation. It is a Greek point of view; ethical and pacific.

"The teaching of Christ was a sublime and original contribution to the moral improvement of mankind. But it is doubtful whether the Christian religion would have made the conquest of Europe had it not been of all Oriental religions the most Greek and the most nearly akin alike to the best thought of the Greek philosophers and to those popular notions of purgatory and purification, of eternal bliss and eternal torment, of a divine mediator between God and man, and of some sacramental ceremony whereby the sinner might be cleansed of his sin and assured of his salvation hereafter, which were already current among the Greeks, and the basis of solemn religious observance over that wide tract of the Mediterranean basin in which Greek civilization prevailed."

HISTORY: *Studies in History and Politics* (1920), *O.U.P.*; *A History of Europe* (1935), *Arnold*; *Napoleon* (1913), *O.U.P.* BIOGRAPHY: *Lord Bryce* (1927), *O.U.P.* AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Pages from the Past* (1939), *O.U.P.*; *An Unfinished Autobiography* (1941), *O.U.P.*



## W. B. YEATS

1865-1939

ALTHOUGH by birth an Irishman (he was born near Dublin in 1865), Yeats has been the most influential poet in English literature since Browning died in 1889. The influence has not been so much technical, or even literary, as purely æsthetic. Yeats, by his whole life, and by his complete devotion to the art of poetry, has maintained a standard, a sort of poetic procedure, from which he has never swerved. With his keen mind, and his susceptible imagination, he has followed many paths, some of them into dubious country and dark places; but he has always returned to the main road of poetry, the richer for his odd experiences.

Now that line of conduct has been unique during a half-century when moral, social, political, and psychological forces have been in the melting-pot. The reason why there have been no giants in the field of English poetry during the last fifty years may be due to this fact, that belief, and the stability of judgment, have been shaken. Without a wide-reaching and firm faith, no poet can build largely, any more than an architect can build a cathedral on a quicksand. Moods, doubts, joy by flashes, momentary subtleties and verbal beauties; these may be thrown off by poets during such a period, but a more sustained integrity is rare.

Yeats, however, has maintained a steady course, and now that his life is over and his work rounded off (he died in 1939), we see how single it was in its aim. That aim was the pursuit of poetry, the essential poetry that is unadorned and undisguised by intellectual properties, or any sensuous fashions of the moment.

During his life, however, Yeats did not always give the impression of such singleness. He was attached to movements; artistic, religious, and even political. His activities and whims were many. He was always willing to follow a mood. Indeed, his complaint against our latter-day school of over-earnest poets was that they were too conscientious. I remember that during the last year of his life he said to me, "The young English poets of to-day have forgotten one essential. They never trust to luck." That may sound capricious. In fact, it is profound, and comes from the acuteness of instinct, which is the source of poetry. Such a course is the only one to prevent stagnation of the soul.

So completely did Yeats believe in it, that he made a discipline, a system out of it. He followed his own vagary and employed the

W. B. YEATS

whole of his nature, mental and emotional, in that pursuit. The effect upon his life was vivifying. He never grew old as a poet. Indeed, in his last period, he was ahead of the youngest generation of English poets of the 1930's, a greater rebel than any of them, while knowing fully—which they did not—what he was rebelling against.



Charcoal drawing by John S. Sargent

Apart from this constant closeness to the delights of chance, Yeats found his career in poetry roughly divided into three parts. In his youth, he was somewhat facile and lyrical, identifying himself with the picturesque 'nineties. Oscar Wilde, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, all tinged with decadence, were his "co-mates and brothers in exile" from the dingy world of dying Victorianism.

This was followed by his return to Ireland and his work there to re-establish a national theatre and literature. It was a somewhat exotic nationalism, with an æsthetic so aristocratic that the Irish people never fully accepted it. But the founding of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, with Lady Gregory, the brothers Fay, George Moore, George Russell, and others, occupied his mature years. He wrote his lovely verse-plays for this purpose. The story of his effort is told in his own volume *Autobiographies*.

Running alongside this activity, and finally out-running it, was his interest in occultism and Oriental religions. Madame Blavatsky opened the door, and for a time he disappeared. For a time only: he came back, and was a poet still. The strange and searching adventures of the spirit during that excursion had purged his verse of its vague lyricism and its Celtic twilight. He began to write harsh, bare, cryptic poetry, whose meaning not he himself could logically explain. In his later books, *The Tower*, *The Winding Stair*, and *Last Poems*, he rounded off his quest, and departed savagely, with a gesture of magnificent defiance.

Through all these periods, however, there shows the one belief. It is a simple one. He played many intellectual parts during his life, and adopted not a few poses. But now we see how direct was his inspiration as a poet. Fundamentally, he believed only in his own instinct. Everything else, his dabbings in esoterics, his theatrical adventures in Dublin, his orations as a Senator in the Irish Free State, were only adventures. Through all this ran his simple faith, which he first found "Down in the Salley Gardens" when he was young, and his lover "bade me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree". He never forgot that lesson. One of the last songs he sang begins thus:

"What if I bade you leave  
The cavern of the mind?  
There's better exercise  
In the sunlight and the wind."

That proud and unshaken faith in himself, and his native gift, has made him a great poet, and carried him through a period of doubt and shaken foundations.

POEMS: *The Tower* (1928), *Macmillan*; *The Winding Stair* (1933), *Macmillan*; *Collected Poems* (1935), *Macmillan*; *Last Poems and Plays* (1934), *Macmillan*. PLAYS: *Nine One-Act Plays* (1937), *Macmillan*; *Collected Plays* (1934), *Macmillan*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Autobiographies* (1926), *Macmillan*.

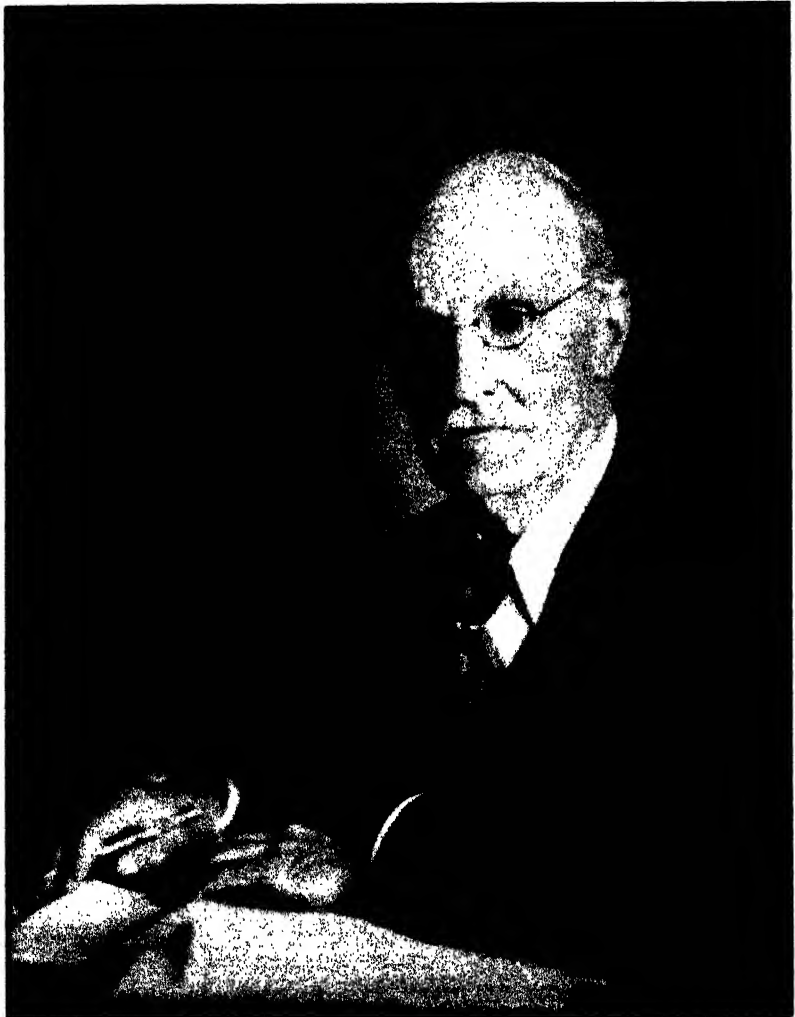
## GILBERT MURRAY

b. 1866

GILBERT MURRAY has been in the forefront of international politics throughout the unhappy period of the false peace between the two phases of the World War. His position as Chairman of the League of Nations Union from 1923 to 1938 made him one of the most active and influential figures in the effort to banish war and to set mankind upon the way to a rational control of its social economy and the working of its ethical machine. That effort was later arrested, but not robbed of its nobility. And if no great work is done in vain, we are yet to see the fruits of Gilbert Murray's public life.

What are the principles upon which this man has lived and worked? They are those of a scholar and a religious enthusiast to whom the esoteric side of Greek thought and feeling has been revealed. To Gilbert Murray, *gentleness* is a guiding force, a strength that nothing can defeat. He has made from it a philosophy. Let his own words explain it. "*Sophrosyné*," he says, "however we try to translate it, temperance, gentleness, the spirit that in any trouble thinks and is patient, that saves and not destroys, is the right spirit." That is how he interprets the essence of the genius of Greece. It is the driving force behind the teaching of Plato. It sets the direction of the conflict in the dramas of those three outstanding masters, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, whose plays Dr. Murray has translated into English and popularized by his lyrical gift. His versions, of Euripides in particular, have made the Greek theatre an integral part of the English theatre. On the stage, and even more as broadcast plays, the simplicity and vigorous rhythmic flow of his verse translations carry these dramatists out of the ancient world into the modern; living men who have known suffering and the joy of endurance. His work, with its fidelity, its conviction of the greatness of the civilization on which his own activities have been a commentary, links that classical past to the Greece of to-day, and to the whole human society of to-morrow.

He was born in Australia in 1866, son of the President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. He came to England at the age of eleven, and became Professor of Greek at Glasgow University at the age of twenty-three. He was afterwards Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford for twenty-eight years. During that time he has taken an active part, outside Parliament, in the political life of the country, or one might more rightly say, of the world. Of



*Elliott & Fry*

his translations from the Greek dramatists I have already spoken. They are now a permanent addition to English literature. If I were asked, however, to direct the reader to the source of this man's life, to the cause of the beauty in his work and his personal bearing in the traffic of the world, I would recommend two studies. The first is an essay called *Religio Grammatici*. It is his testament of virtue. With G. Lowes Dickinson's *The Greek View of Life*, it is a statement of

the central strength of the human spirit and mind. Augmenting it, is the collection of studies, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, from which my quotation above is taken. The doctrine of the one, and the revelation of the other, sum up his faith and his nature; subtle, simple, and profoundly good. He has said that "all through antiquity the fight against luxury was a fiercer and stronger fight than comes into our modern experience. From some time before the Christian era it seems as if the subconscious instinct of humanity was slowly rousing itself for a great revolt against the intolerable tyranny of the sense over the soul." He has carried the principles of that pre-Christian asceticism into the modern world, fighting against the luxury of extravagant thought and action, revolting against the tyranny of materialism.

ESSAYS: Euripides and His Age (1913), *O.U.P.*; Religio Grammatici (1918), *Unwin*; Five Stages of Greek Religion (1925), *Watts*. TRANSLATIONS: The Plays of Æschylus in English (1920-30), 9 vols., *Unwin*; The Plays of Euripides in English (1902-15), 7 vols., *Unwin*; Sophocles' Oedipus Rex (1913), *Unwin*.

## H. G. WELLS

1866-1946

IF John Galsworthy was the spokesman of that section of the British people who directed the building of the Empire, Herbert George Wells voices that vastly larger population which *does the job*. His Kipps, Mr. Polly, Bert Smallways, are representative specimens of the technician, shopkeeper, odd-job man who, in their anonymous millions, grub on from day to day, in humour and out of it, building and maintaining a world much larger than they dare hope to understand. Wells has immortalized that little man in the back street, the suburb, the scrubby village, making his whining voice, his pert humour take shape and a formidable dimension. He has led those millions forward, offering them a prospect of saner ways of life, of more coherent methods of work and play, of a science in place of a superstition, and a brotherhood in place of a predatory society.

That, perhaps, will be remembered as the principal contribution of H. G. Wells to English literature. He scorned the word "literature",





and used to say that the critic who applied it to his work was irrelevant. But he was wrong. Wells is a giant, and amongst his larger than life attributes is that of literary artistry. He is many other things as well. He is prophet, preacher, entrepreneur of science, blower of Utopia-bubbles, fantasist of mechanics, political pamphleteer, iconoclast and wilful interpreter of history. He has even written a book on how to play with toy soldiers. Indeed, he has been so

many things of momentary and topical interest that we may tend to forget that he is a great novelist.

The conditions of his early life were not unlike those in which Dickens began. He came from the same class, the lower middle class, the class which *scrapes* along, propped up on one hand by a threadbare respectability, and on the other by the spectre of starvation. So it was in Dickens's childhood at the beginning of the nineteenth century; so it was in Wells's childhood at the middle of that century. Those were the days of competitive Liberalism, the worldwide gold-rush, when the weak went to the wall. In his early years, Wells groped his way along under the shadow of that wall, and what he saw there filled him with disgust, passion, and a zeal for reform. His novels are the expression of those emotions. At first, he was content to symbolize them through a gallery of characters in the Dickensian tradition; comic, pathetic, even tragic figures, struggling against their own illiteracy and political ignorance, fighting to get out of the rut, to look around on the mess which the machine age was making of the fair world of nature. Gradually that struggle became an obsession with Wells. He joined in the struggle, and his novels became a stamping ground whereon his ideas wrestled with his indignation. Like Tolstoi, he took his mission so seriously that he professed to have no time for his art as a novelist. He wrote an essay,

*The Contemporary Novel*, in 1911, in which he denounced all people who looked upon the novel as a plaything, a means of relaxation. He even denied that it should have a specific form (this was a back-kick at his bugbear, Henry James), and proposed henceforth to use it as a sort of string bag, in which he would carry to market any and every fruit of his rich mind. And he did so. His later essays in pseudo-fiction are ever-varying in shape. Often, they assume the forms of his earlier work, some being Utopian fantasies, others scientific forecasts; while occasionally, as in his recent romance *Dolores*, he returns to the love story. But the tendency of his work has been towards more and more argument, testily reiterated, and to the pouring out of floods of words down which float his old contempt for politicians, social muddlers, and big-business magnates; all people who stand in the way of a proper organization of human society as a technical, economic, and scientific whole.

But the great novelist remains. His stories of the English little-man, the John Citizen; the loves, hates, frustrations and false hopes of the average man; these remain to show the world of what stuff the mind, and even the soul, of that average Englishman is made. Further, Wells's short stories, such as *The Country of the Blind* and *The Door in the Wall*, have a quality over and above a missionary value. Their symbolism is universal, and their beauty permanent.

His own life, perhaps, is most nearly portrayed in his three or four greatest novels: *Kipps*, *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, *The History of Mr. Polly*, and *Tono-Bungay*. In those books he made lively use of his own early experiences. The childhood in Bromley, Kent, where he was born of a father who was a professional cricketer and a mother who was a housekeeper in an aristocratic family; the poverty with all its furtive conditions, the apprenticeship in a drapery shop, the struggle for self-education and the entry as a teacher into the academic world and finally to success as a writer; all these have been grist to the mill of his restless imagination and his rebellious mind. With Bernard Shaw, he became one of the most powerful influences during the turn of the century, when the old political and religious forms were breaking up, in preparation for the establishment of those which are still in the making.

NOVELS: *The Time Machine* (1895), *Dent (Everyman)*; *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *Heinemann*; *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900), *Collins*; *Kipps* (1905), *Collins*; *The War in the Air* (1908); *Tono-Bungay* (1909), *Collins*; *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910), *Collins*; *Mr. Britling Sees it*

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Through (1916), *Collins*; The Shape of Things to Come (1933), *Hutchinson*; Apropos of Dolores (1938), *Cape*. SHORT STORIES: The Country of the Blind (1911), *Collins*; The Short Stories of H. G. Wells (1927), *Benn*. HISTORY: The Outline of History (1920), *Cassell*; Short History of the World (1920), *Watts*. SOCIOLOGY: The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind (1932).

## JOHN GALSWORTHY

1867-1933

THERE is no doubt that, of all modern English writers, John Galsworthy has been the most influential in forming the foreign reader's view of the English scene and character. Millions of interested people in all parts of the world have a vivid conception of the social habits, the moral code, the domestic tradition, and the actualities of town and countryside of Great Britain. And that conception is based upon the novels of John Galsworthy.

It is one which has a limited authenticity. Some critics will say that it is already out of date. More extreme critics will say that it was always partial, over-static, and hedged in by the limited social experience and natural timidity of the author of *The Forsyte Saga*. Such criticism is valid; but after the necessary discount has been made, there remains a solid quality in Galsworthy's work which must be accepted as a microcosm of a very definite, and very powerful section of the British community. It might be called the Upper Middle Class; that which includes the polite professions such as Medicine, the Law, the Church, the Services, together with the leaders of the industrial and commercial world of the nineteenth century. Inter-married with these was that class from which Galsworthy himself sprang; the smaller gentry, or landed proprietors.

Throughout the nineteenth century these people, their various activities firmly dovetailed into each other by prosperity, flourished exceedingly. Their fortunes floated on the tide of the machine age, and they as a class represented that aspect of the British vitality and character upon which the Empire was based. Like all acquisitive societies, that class had its limitations. John Galsworthy did not hesitate to portray them. He showed the hard-faced suspicion which these purse-proud folk could turn upon outsiders. He showed their false interpretation of the Stoic philosophy, their clannishness and



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sentimentalism, their crude indifference to the arts, science, and culture, their contempt for the gentle, the meek, and the poor.

Galsworthy, though born into that class, shared neither its opinions nor its lack of sensibilities. He was a man of extreme compassion. This faculty ordered his life so consistently that while still a young man he broke away from the tradition in which he had been trained. He never escaped the effects of that training, and remained throughout his life a "gentleman" in the social sense of the word; in his manners a product of the English public school training, reserved, dignified, with a marked distaste

for self-advertisement. Beneath this veneer, however, was a man very different from the Soames Forsyte, whose spokesman he had elected to be. Joseph Conrad, in a letter to him, called him "a humanitarian moralist", and further added "a moralist must present us with a gospel; he must give counsel, not to our reason or sentiment, but to our very soul. Do you feel in yourself the stature for that task?"

Galsworthy's life-work is the answer to that shrewd question from a fellow-writer. He *did* feel in himself the necessary stature, and in spite of his timid personality, his shrinking from controversy, his hatred of publicity, he disciplined himself to the stern task of instilling into society (at least that section of British society which he knew) the startling doctrine of Christ, "Love thy neighbour as thyself."

His temperament was well equipped for the mission. To his natural compassion and tenderness of spirit, he added by self-training an artist's susceptibility. He put himself to school with the Russian novelists, and especially Turgeniev, another critic of a society as a

## JOHN GALSWORTHY

whole. His intense love of dumb animals, of flowers, of tangible things which delight or mortify the senses, clothed his moral preoccupations with a warm flesh of romantic realism. The deep, velvet-like texture of his work drapes all the passions and joys and sorrows at the same time as it presents them. From romances such as *The Dark Flower*, to the final and somewhat weary later stages of *The Forsyte Saga*, wherein Galsworthy is moving about in a post-war world that is foreign to him, this quality of rich sensuous apprehension never deserts his prose. It is not a poetic quality so much as a moral one. For in verse Galsworthy never achieved anything of much value. In moral judgment he achieved much. He set the English governing class to contemplate itself, and the English materialists to question their old standards of values. What has resulted is a significant change. The British Empire has given place to something that has incorporated a little of the teaching of John Galsworthy. It has become the British Commonwealth of Nations.

NOVELS: *The Patrician* (1911), *Heinemann*; *The Forsyte Saga* (various dates up to 1922), *Heinemann*; *A Modern Comedy* (1929); *The End of the Chapter* (1934); *The Dark Flower* (1913). PLAYS: *Justice* (1910), *Duckworth*; *The Skin Game* (1920), *Duckworth*; *Loyalties* (1925), *Duckworth*; *Escape* (1926), *Duckworth*. POEMS: *Collected Poems* (1934), *Heinemann*. SHORT STORIES: (1925), *Heinemann*, 3 vols.

## ARNOLD BENNETT

1867-1931

ARNOLD BENNETT, like Somerset Maugham and J. B. Priestley, is a writer whom the more exclusive critics have been inclined to patronize rather than to appreciate, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the fact that the great reading public has delighted in his work. His subject matter has always been the ordinary, commonplace English people, and his endeavour has been to present them without comment. Unlike Wells, his contemporary, he has always believed that the author's opinions should, so far as is possible, be kept out of his work.

Such being his first principle, he went to France to find out how to practise it. But before doing so, and before being so convinced of his literary direction, he spent his early life in a provincial atmosphere



Caricature by David Low  
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which coloured his temperament for the rest of his life. Born in 1867 in the grim potteries, in Staffordshire, the son of a solicitor, he was educated at local schools and London University. He was articled as a solicitor's clerk, but on winning a prize for a short story, he decided to try his luck as a journalist. For a time he edited a women's paper (a useful apprenticeship for a novelist), meanwhile contributing short stories and articles to the Press. But this was only a means to an end. Although living in London, and revelling in its metropolitan character, he remembered the Five Towns of the Pottery District, and saw in them a universe which he was determined to portray. He knew that gauche, provincial world. It was in his bones. He knew its people, with their dourness, their restricted outlook, their contentment with ugliness, their suspicion of strangers and of new things, their capacity for hard work and endurance. He saw these characteristics in himself, and believed that he could make good use of them. Such was the material in which he proposed to work. But, as though in contradiction of it, he saw in himself also a fastidiousness, a delicacy toward the means of self-expression. At an early stage in his development he realized how concerned he was with prose style, and how jealously he must work to perfect and to preserve a vehicle through which he could succeed in his literary ambition. His approach to the art of writing was not a poetic one. It was more deliberate than sensuous, depending rather upon accuracy than upon intuition.

With his theme thus chosen, and his method of craftsmanship thus determined, he was shrewd enough to know exactly where to put himself to school. In 1900 he went to Paris, where he lived for eight years, and married a Frenchwoman. During that time he maintained himself by writing, but in addition he was studying the French language, knowing that its genius, its character, was precisely suited to what he wanted to do with his native tongue. He read Flaubert, Maupassant, and particularly Balzac. No doubt, too, he learned a certain amount of the method of documentation from Zola.

At last assured of his technique, he bravely gave up all other work and retired to a country villa outside Paris. In five months he wrote his masterpiece, *The Old Wives' Tale*, a long panoramic story relating the lives, from childhood to old age, of two sisters, Constance and Sophia Baines. Constance remained at home, inheriting the family business, a small drapery shop in one of the Five Towns. Sophia's life was outwardly more adventurous, and it led her to endure the Siege of Paris in 1870, during which time she maintained her

boarding-house (Bennett always had a keen interest in domestic economy, both large- and small-scale). The general colour of the book proceeds through the warmth and vague hopefulness of youth to the time-bleached closeness of old age. Round these two ordinary women's lives, Bennett faithfully paints in the whole provincial civilization of Midland England. From the tape-measure in the little shop to the wide and frightening changes taking place in the Black Country (representative growing-pains of the Industrial Age), Bennett neglects nothing that shall add a significant solidity to his scene.

The book was well received, though at first the sales were not large. Bennett was encouraged to fulfil his aim of becoming known as the literary spokesman of a province. He wrote a trilogy of novels, called *The Clayhanger Family*, possessing the same merits, and possibly more attractive people, as *The Old Wives' Tale*.

But there was another side to him. The Bennett that came to Town was from the first determined to be a thorough metropolitan, even a cosmopolitan. He set out to be a connoisseur of the good things of life, and to explore the pleasures of sophistication. He was too gentle, shy (he suffered from a stammer), and sensitive a character ever to succeed as a worldling. His delight in the good things of life was a little too conscious. Although he became famous, and the most powerful literary critic of the 1920 decade, his dash, his social bravura, his *knowingness* about the best drinks and eats, and the latest sensation in Town, always had a slightly competitive and challenging quality, as though he were bent on showing the high-brows, the Londoners, how a man from the Provinces could beat them on their own ground.

That self-consciousness, however, died with him. His work remains, and the novels of which *The Old Wives' Tale* is representative are likely to survive as examples of English fiction at its best; faithful work expressed in a prose both scrupulous and dignified.

NOVELS: *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902), *Penguins*; *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), *Dent (Everyman)*; *Clayhanger* (1910), *Methuen*; *Hilda Lessways* (1911), *Methuen*; *These Twain* (1916), *Methuen* (the above three together comprise "The Clayhanger Family", *Methuen*); *Riceyman Steps* (1923), *Cassell*. SHORT STORIES: *Tales of the Five Towns* (1905). PLAYS: *Milestones* (1912), *Methuen*; *The Great Adventure* (1913), *Methuen*.



## HILAIRE BELLOC

b. 1870-1953

HILAIRE BELLOC is a startling example of the wide-rooted nature of British literary inspiration. His origins may be read about in a book recently published by his sister, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, who has her own fame too. He was born of a French father and an English mother, a woman of outstanding character. His education combined the best of both civilizations, the British and the French. After serving in the French artillery, he went to Oxford, and acquired that mental aristocratic vigour which is peculiar to Balliol College. He has retained it through a long life of prodigious work as author, editor, and politician. Unlike Chesterton, the man with whom he was for so long associated, he has been a merciless opponent both in print and on the platform. His knowledge, especially of military matters, is extensive. As a historian, he is concise only because his material is sifted down to essentials.

This vigour, this ruthless power for controversy, however, has never been basely or wantonly used. He has had a purpose in life, and that purpose has been the upholding of truth and virtue. He is a great moralist, in the same way that Samuel Johnson was a moralist. Virtue, that is to say, is part of his character and instinct. He does not believe in it on principle. He believes as a tree puts out its leaves. And like a tree he expresses his virtue by means of beauty. His prose and verse are shaped by a strong, natural discipline. It is the same discipline which moves the whole of his being and which he sees as the directing force of the universe. Thus the beauty and dignity of his literary work are not merely an ornament, they are the skeleton of his achievement.

Born in July 1870, under a leonine sign, he has lived and fought like a lion. And for what has he fought? For what has he deployed his great gifts as poet, essayist, historian, politician? His purpose has been to maintain and to keep open the path to Rome. The book for which he is most famous has that very title, *The Path to Rome*. It is one of the most beautiful open-air books in our language. An account of a walking tour through the wine country of the Moselle, through Switzerland, over the Alps, and down through Tuscany to Rome, it covers roughly that part of Europe which may be called the core of the Holy Roman Empire. And it covers that moment of magic revelation which greets the traveller (as it greeted Goethe) who comes from the barbarian side of the Alps to the south and the



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sun of the metropolitan lands of the Empire, and the Latin civilization. It is a great theme. It has been the theme of Belloc's whole life. For him that Empire is still a living culture, the noblest, most orderly, most venerable and ripest that human nature has ever established. He sees the course of European history as a struggle by the Gothic north to disrupt that Empire, and to replace its spiritual order by a materialistic one of Protestantism, in which Commerce, Usury (banking), and the arrogance of wealth replace the three virtues of St. Francis. His *Path to Rome*, published in 1902 while he was still a young man, has for its background the whole of that conflict, and all the poetry implicit in its drama. Fundamentally, he is a man of peace, with a deep, brooding joy in the poetry which is capable of blossoming under the sun of that faith, that civilization, which rose in the Mediterranean world. Allow him for one moment to turn his mind from the grim necessity of the battle against the north, and wit, humour, and geniality bubble up as gaily as ever they did in the soul of his friend and fellow-musketeer, G. K. Chesterton.

From a full bibliography it would be seen how vast and how various his literary output has been. Add to that his work as editor:

## HILAIRE BELLOC

during the 1914-18 war he was the most influential editor of his day, when he ran *Land and Water*, a weekly specializing in military affairs: as journalist, orator, and Member of Parliament (a Catholic Liberal), and one has some idea of his greatness. Son of both Britain and France, he remains, and will remain, one of the strongest links between them.

TRAVEL: *The Path to Rome* (1902), *Nelson*; *The Cruise of the Nona* (1925), *Constable*. HISTORY: *A Companion to Mr. Wells' "Outline of History"* (1926), *Sheed*; *The French Revolution* (1911), *O.U.P.*; *How the Reformation Happened* (1928), *Cape*. BIOGRAPHY: *James II* (1934), *Faber*. POEMS: *Cautionary Tales* (1908), *Sonnets and Verse* (1938), *Duckworth*. ESSAYS: *Conversation with an Angel* (1928), *Cape*.

## J. M. SYNGE

1871-1909

It is recorded by W. B. Yeats in his autobiography how, at the turn of the century, he found John Millington Synge rotting in Paris, a typical example of the artistic cosmopolitan dying of thirst at the fountain-head of art. He saw enough in the wreckage, however, to urge himself to an attempt at salvage. With his gift for influencing people to bring out the best in themselves, he drove Synge back to Ireland, to help in the new movement to establish a Celtic revival in the arts. Synge's post was in the dramatic section. History tells how well he carried out his poet-imposed duties.

Born in 1871, of Anglo-Irish stock, he left Trinity College, Dublin, and lived in France, with occasional travels in Italy and Germany. During those formative years he listened to the storms that were blowing across literary Europe, and the winds of discussion about realism, symbolism, and the rest settled in his brain. But Yeats turned him from this to a specific purpose. He was to study the Anglo-Irish idiom at first hand, amongst the natives of the western isles and the Atlantic coast.

The result was a body of plays that brought the light of European vision into the rather dubious Celtic twilight, which even Lady Gregory's vigour and Yeats's genius could not dispel. These plays

were produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and the tragedies were duly appreciated by the Irish public. Synge succeeded in isolating for his dramatic purpose an idiom free of the music-hall "brogue". The lovely dialect which the Gaelic larynx and temperament have

made out of the English language was taken by Synge with that artistic skill which hides its own devices, and the dialogue of his little plays seemed to run quite naïvely off the tongues of his characters, characters generalized and typical of the primitive fisher-folk and peasants who in real life actually did speak in poetic metaphor. But Synge's manipulation of this native richness of phrase was as art-



ful as the skill with which Gogol handled the language of the Russian peasant in his stories *Evenings on a Farm in Dikanka*.

The European training of Synge affected more than his medium of words. It directed his attitude towards the rather self-conscious Celtic Movement, and also towards the appalling insularity of the outlook of the people about whom he was writing. With his comedy, and his best work, *The Playboy of the Western World*, he brought both the religious and nationalist prejudices of the Irish public down on the Abbey Theatre. But Yeats, autocratic and aloof, and also utterly fearless, stood by him, and the play was maintained. The Abbey Theatre survived. The controversy survives too.

Synge died prematurely, in 1909, of tuberculosis, at the height of his newly discovered power. His death was a great loss to the Irish

J. M. SYNGE

theatre, for none of the other brilliant dramatists who were his contemporaries and followers has done quite what he was capable of doing. He pointed a way to a perfect blend of realism and symbolism. The other dramatists have drawn to one or the other of the two techniques, but not to that happy poetic unity which marks Synge's miniature tragedies and comedies of peasant life. His descriptive study, *The Aran Isles*, and his poems and translations, show how well equipped he was for this specialized job which the far-seeing eye of Yeats had beckoned upon him.

PLAYS: *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1905), *Unwin*; *Riders to the Sea* (1905), *Unwin*; *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), *Unwin*; *The Tinker's Wedding* (1908), *Unwin*. TRAVEL: *The Aran Isles* (1907), *Unwin*.

W. H. DAVIES

1871-1940

THE most picturesque figure in contemporary British literature is William Henry Davies, known for many years as "the tramp poet". Born of Welsh parents in Newport, Wales, in 1871, he left home after an abortive apprenticeship to a picture-frame maker, and spent some years as a "hobo" in the United States. This school of experience lasted for several years, with intermittent voyages across the Atlantic in cattle boats. His rough life, in which he held his own as a fighting man, was changed when he lost his foot train-jumping. Crippled, he came home to England, where for another eight years he lived in common lodging-houses. His income was ten shillings a week, inherited from his grandmother, but he preferred to save this and to earn a living by street singing and peddling small wares such as boot-laces. At the age of thirty-four he paid for the publication of a book of poems called *The Soul's Destroyer*, which bore the imprint of the doss-house where he was living. He sent a copy to Bernard Shaw, who at once recognized a genius and acclaimed him. Other critics followed suit, and Davies was famous. The Government gave him a small pension, and for the rest of his life (he enjoyed every moment of it until his death in 1940) he poured out a flood of ecstatic lyrical verse, sitting like a robin near the ground, beadily conscious of the small riches of the soil. The story of his life has been told by him



Portrait by Dame Laura Knight

in his *Autobiography of a Super-tramp*, a book which is now a classic. He once told me that it had brought him in a steady fifteen shillings a week since its publication in 1908. That remark was characteristic of him. He had a simple, direct, peasant's idea of worldly values. But his poetic values were pure and absolute, within their limits.

Those limits were part of his unique personality. I know of no writer who is to be so closely identified with his work. Davies the man was exactly like his own poems. He was small, with a fine, saturnine, gipsy head, enormous brown eyes that glowed with warmth and kindness. Yet, on occasion, a peasant shrewdness and cunning suffused them, especially when he was confiding some secret persecution to a friend. For he had a persecution mania. He suspected that every room in which he slept was plagued with rats, and he preferred to put out a saucer of bread and milk to propitiate them. All other poets were rivals, secretly plotting his extinction, by fair means or foul. But he did not blame them for this. He saw it as the way of the world, as he had learned that technique round the tramps' camp fires, or in the doss-houses of London. It did not impair his generosity and his kindness to dog, child, or prostitute. Some things he feared terribly, notably rats, and what he called "educated ladies".

As a poet, he had no intellectual range in his work. He was incapable even of sustaining his interest over the reading of an epic. But his knowledge of Elizabethan lyrical poetry was intimate and loving. He was himself a belated singer from the seventeenth century, using material from two sources. The first of these was timeless. He sang of nature (though he had no observed knowledge of it). Robins, sparrows in the snow, nightingales under the moon, rain falling on green leaves; these were his constant theme, with small variation. Yet from such worn material he made the most enchanting songs, that captured the hearts of sophisticated and ingenuous readers alike. The second source of his inspiration was his own experiences in the chaotic world of this industrial age. Tramps, workmen, prostitutes, children, sailors, he sang of them in their local scene, offering a naïve commentary upon society and its meaningless congruity of kindness and cruelty. But whatever the source of his song, it was immediately incorporated in his personal note, a clear, bird-like music, that came upon the reader like a cadenza of springtime, when the trees, the birds, the small animals return to life, and the world is a paradise again, where man walks and forgets his burden of history and sin.

W. H. DAVIES

POEMS: *The Soul's Destroyer* (1905); *The Complete Poems of W. H. Davies* (1934), *Cape*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *The Autobiography of a Super-tramp* (1908), *Cape*.

## WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

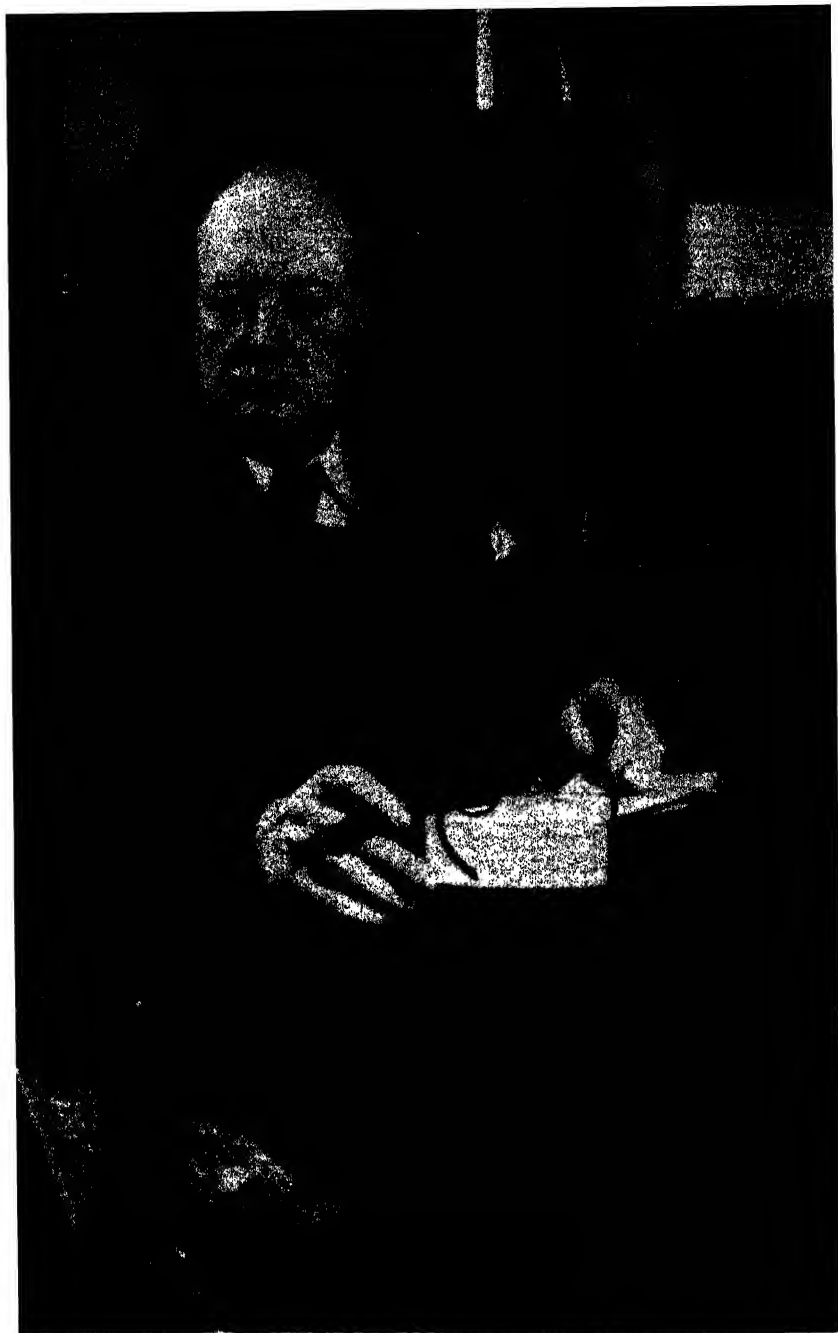
b. 1874

To introduce Winston Churchill to-day is rather like getting up at dawn to announce the rising of the sun. It is the action of a crank or an imbecile. This man, whose force of character and subtly-simple personality were for five years concentrated upon leading the British Commonwealth of Nations to victory, has stood for so long before the glare of publicity that he is a part of world history, and will be discussed accordingly for centuries to come. I can only remark here, therefore, upon the double aspect of his genius, and show how oddly, almost anachronistically, it is placed in time.

We had begun to think that the possibility of a man excelling both in the world of action and the world of letters had vanished. The world of action had become too vast, too specialized and departmentalized. The world of letters, in reflecting that other growth, had become too widely spread, and language had accordingly worn thin and threadbare. Could it be possible for one man to exercise again the classical gift of universal synthesis; to grasp with one hand the control of human affairs, and with the other a pen to record that control? It had been possible in the miniature Greek States during the Golden Age. It had been possible even in Imperial Rome, where the conditions of life were approximating more to those of our modern bureaucratic life. It had been possible, under certain retarded conditions, even as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century, as we see from the life and work of Goethe. But modern life and politics were too complicated, loaded with precedent and increasingly technical formality, to permit of divided service. We see how Henry Adams in America had to relinquish his political ambition in order to remain a historian. We see how Lord Macaulay in England, by remaining a historian and critic, carried the methods of his art into Parliament, and was little more than an ornament there.

Obvious conclusions were to be drawn from these examples; conclusions based on a study of facts and tendencies. Winston Churchill overthrew those conclusions, and in doing so returned us to a loser,





WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

freer estimate of the age of civilization, and of its latent capacity for surprising us. He has made it young again, more elastic and adventurous. Its sophistications, its subservience to the spider-like control of the money-market, are challenged by his leadership. For, in effect, as in character, he is an artist, and in estimating the nature of his administrative method, its directness and dependence upon humane contacts and considerations, we have always to bear this in mind. And in the end, this recollection may help us to explain why Winston Churchill has always stood outside the political party machinery, its dullness, its routine, its clumsiness, while at the same time manipulating it with a skill that has made him suspect among the dunderheads and the office-mongers.

Along with that public life, he has been a writer. He entered the army at the age of twenty-one. He published his first commentary three years later (*The Story of the Malakand Field Force*). For nearly half a century since that first double overture, he has maintained that method of life. He acts first. Then he retires a little and digests his experience, before recording it as a well-considered body of facts, still warm in his grasp, but now ordered and knit together into an artistic significance. And the medium for that presentation is a prose as ample as his own personal gesture. It is part of his field of action. It is his courage and his genius for oratory brought to the study and demonstrated in privacy; that privacy of pen and ink which in the end is the greatest publicity of all, because more enduring than action, and more confiding than deeds. As will be seen from his three outstanding books, *My Early Life*, *The World Crisis*, and *Marlborough*, he is always the man of action, the shrewd and instant assessor of character and situation. It is this tremendous dynamic which fills his prose style, and makes it an ample vehicle for the man.

**HISTORY:** *Story of the Malakand Field Force* (1898); *The World Crisis* (1931), *Macmillan*. **AUTOBIOGRAPHY:** *My Early Life* (1930), *Macmillan*. **BIOGRAPHY:** *Marlborough* (1933-8), *Harrap*, 4 vols.; *Great Contemporaries* (1937), *Macmillan*. **SPEECHES:** *Into Battle* (1941), *Cassell*; *Unrelenting Struggle* (1942), *Cassell*.

## G. K. CHESTERTON

1874-1936

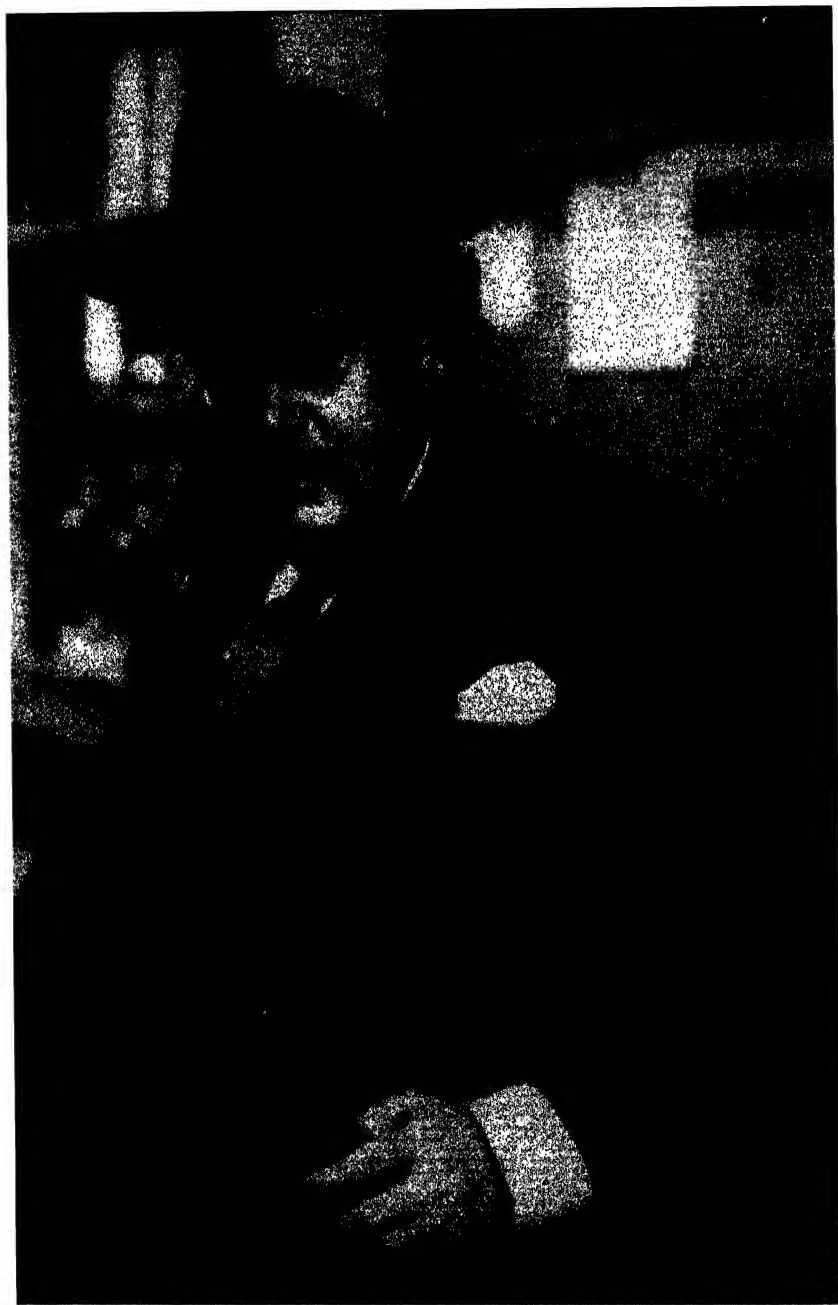
THROUGHOUT the first quarter of this century, Hilaire Belloc and Gilbert Keith Chesterton shone like twin stars in the sky of English literature. Their lives and work were so closely integrated that books done in collaboration were called "Chesterbellocs". Together, they fought the good fight for a return to the Golden Age of Mediævalism, when the Catholic international, in their view, made such things as a League of Nations unnecessary. Their argument was that the evils of to-day were due to industrialism, the bankers, and Protestantism. It is a theory that has some basis, but it lacks scientific verification, and it overlooks the fact that financial machinations and economic tyranny are not exactly a modern evil.

Now while Belloc supported this theme with destructive vehemence that called for violent retaliation both from scholars and ignorant fools, and sometimes from a few wise men, Chesterton wielded a different weapon. He laid about him with the blade of good humour, irresponsible wit, and whimsicality. He played the Porthos to Belloc's Aramis. Being only a convert to Catholicism, he was the more picturesque and fanciful, with more particular concern for the trappings of that Faith.

Nevertheless, he was a profoundly serious man, and his critical penetration was that of a genius. It flashed intermittently, but it wounded, and touched the vital spots in the system he was attacking. He might be described as a benevolent anarchist, whose theory of Distributionism owed much to William Morris, and to the possibilities of local handicraft and home-made beer. All that, however, was an adjunct to his literary ability and achievement, just as Belloc's dogma, or at least its lively exposition, was irrelevant to his magnificent Roman literary style.

In their conscious purpose, which was to hold back the tide of modernism, they failed. But in their natural purpose, implicit in their native gifts, they succeeded so amply that already their zealotry is being forgotten, and their genius retested without bias, to be given a permanent place amongst the delights of our literature.

Like Belloc, Chesterton was a versatile writer. Born in London in 1874, four years younger than his fellow crusader, he remained a Londoner all his life, although in his later years he lived in its outer suburbs. His real home was Fleet Street, and his throne was in the Dickensian public-houses and chop-houses, some of which have



survived even the German raiders. There he would sit, a figure of vast bulk, talking, gurgling with a sort of internal combustion of humour, emitting little groans of sheer pleasure as he scattered the flowers of his fancy. He was a procrastinator, a man who loved to linger in conversation, rather than to get down to a professional job of work. Publishers who made contracts with him only got their books by inducing his wife to lock him up in a room until the books were written, often in a single night. He spent half his fortune on cabs which he kept waiting outside his rendezvous, and forgot. A legend gathered about his personal habits and figure such as gathered about those of Dr. Johnson.

As a writer he began by being an art critic. This rapidly developed into general criticism of life and letters, for editors soon recognized that here was a journalist with originality of temperament and expression. In time that originality became a restraint, a prison house. His mediævalism grew into an obsession, and his literary device of anti-thesis and startling metaphor became a bad habit. But before his virtues hardened into a vice, he achieved marvellous things in many fields. His poetry alone was various in its triumphs. He could write the great ballad of "Lepanto". He could write drinking songs by the dozen, and at the same time produce that exquisite religious piece "The Donkey". But the poem that expresses the whole man, his own character and method of life, is the famous lyric about the rolling English roads. He, too, progressed in that illogical way; and he too arrived at his destination infinitely enriched by the journey, having found wisdom in the dust.

In prose, he mastered many forms. He was the greatest essayist of his time. He made a special corner in detective fiction with his *Father Brown* stories. He wrote a play called *Magic* in one night, driven by a wager; and it is an excellent play. He wrote long critical studies of Dickens, William Blake, Robert Browning, and St. Thomas Aquinas. He wrote novels like no other novels, such as *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. He even wrote a *History of England*. In all these diverse fields, he remained the unmistakable "G.K.C." as he was called by his hundreds of thousands of affectionate readers; an odd, comic figure, with a deadly serious purpose and capability.

SHORT STORIES: *The Father Brown Stories* (1929). NOVELS: *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), *Lane*; *The Man Who was Thursday* (1908); *The Flying Inn* (1914), *Methuen*. BIOGRAPHY: *St. Francis of Assisi* (1923), *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1933), *Hodder*; *Charles Dickens* (1906), *Methuen*.

G. K. CHESTERTON

PLAY: *Magic* (1913). POEMS: *Collected Poems* (1933), *Methuen*. SELECTIONS: *The Chesterton Omnibus*, *Methuen*; *Stories, Essays and Poems*, *Dent* (*Everyman*).

## WALTER DE LA MARE

b. 1873

THERE is no poet in England, or perhaps in any other language, with whom Walter de la Mare may be compared. His gift is a lyrical one. He is never didactic. He never deliberately tells a story, or is laboriously descriptive. Yet in his verse there is philosophy, a wide and weird scholarship, a precise and observing eye, and a dramatic urgency. All these qualities are common to other poets; but they emerge through Mr. De la Mare's poetry in a special way, an odd way that eludes the critic, the ordinary reader, and, I suspect, the poet himself.

His work, therefore, stands out as something quite unique, something of a single flavour. His novels, his short stories, his poems share this flavour. It cannot be escaped. It comes with ghostliness upon the palate of the mind. Many of his readers, all infatuates, would say casually that it is the flavour of fairyland: but that is not adequate enough. For it comes nearer home than that; it comes from our own experience, our own sensuous reaction to life, and our valuable private interpretations of that life. It is of this world surely enough, for it is so full of recognizable data. Indeed, the evidence it brings is acute, microscopic. We may find in a lyric by De la Mare such a thing as a crystal frost on a withered leaf. We may see ourselves reflected in the mirror of robin's eye, the portrait stabbing us with grotesque criticism.

That last point is important. With all the fantasy, the waywardness, the ghostlight, there is a coherence which gradually works upon the reader, leading him on like will-o'-the-wisp, or Ariel, until he stands in places, in worlds, of which he has never hitherto dreamed, and from whose strange skyline he sees the everyday world from a new angle.

This experience enables the reader to attach meaning, in the moral sense, to De la Mare's poetry. But this comes warily, and a clumsy gesture will ruin the relationship. It is seen that not the subject matter, nor the deliberate choice of it, holds the secret of this poet's value. In these matters he is diverse, often wayward and elusive as though drifting like a fallen leaf upon the winds of fear. But

WALTER DE LA MARE



*Bassano*

whatever his theme, of tangible object, concrete experience, or some magnetic storm of the spirit, there is the recognizable garment of words, of literary style, in which it is clothed. And style is the key to impulse, the basic roots of a poet's very being. This poet may be quoted in support.

“Since even his happiest speech  
Cries of his whither and whence,  
And in mere sound secretes  
His inmost sense.”

Mere sound is something that De la Mare loves to experiment with, especially in his poems written for children. The effect is æolian. Overtones come sighingly out of his strange metrical essays.

WALTER DE LA MARE

It is like listening to the air, in heavy, frosty weather, humming through the wires near a telegraph pole. A child thinks it is the voice of the messages. A grown-up hears it with a sad nostalgia, as the music of time, of vanished humanity, and dreams that are only dreams. The voice passes on, touching the small things of earth, and making them vocal.

“Ever, ever	The lone moon’s silver
Stir and shiver	Sleeks the stream.
The reeds and rushes	What old sorrow,
By the river:	What lost love,
Ever, ever,	Moon, reeds, rushes,
As if in dream,	Dream you of?”

Walter de la Mare was born in 1873 in a quiet Kentish suburb of London. As his name suggests, he is descended from a Huguenot family. As a child he sang in St. Paul’s Cathedral choir, and was educated at the school, where he founded *The Chorister’s Journal*. He went into the commercial world, but the Government gave him a pension, recognizing both his merit and his ill-health. His novel *The Return* won the Polignac Prize in 1911, and the *Memoirs of a Midget* won the James Tait Black Prize in 1921. These two stories, like his other novels and his verse, look at life from points of view that have hitherto baffled human imagination. An excellent study of his work has been written by Forrest Reid (Faber & Faber, 1929).

POEMS: *Songs of Childhood* (1902); *Peacock Pie* (1913), *Faber*; *The Listener* (1942), *Faber*; *Collected Poems* (1942), *Faber*. NOVELS: *The Return* (1929); *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), *Faber*. SHORT STORIES: *The Connoisseur* (1926); *On the Edge* (1930), *Faber*. ESSAYS: *Early One Morning* (1935), *Faber*; *Behold This Dreamer* (1939), *Faber*. ANTHOLOGY: *Come Hither* (1923), *Constable*.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

b. 1874

BOTH as novelist and dramatist, Somerset Maugham stands between the generations. Born in 1874, he is thus contemporary with Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. In temperament, however, he combines the disdain of the 'nineties (the Oscar Wilde period) with the



derision of the younger writers such as Noel Coward and Aldous Huxley. In spite of this historical uniqueness, and also of the fact that he has been consistently a best-seller since he first began to write, the higher critics have only lately begun to consider him worthy of serious attention.

As a craftsman he is simple in his devices, yet subtle in that simplicity; and his hand never falters or hesitates. His scheme of work is sparse, bare. Perhaps that is why his work deceives some critics, who think it negligible and superficial. But with him superficiality is only skin-deep (which sounds almost like an Irishism). Examine that lightness, that hard exterior, that apparently casual and disdainful manner, and discover what a wide range of experience this man has, what a shrewd judgment, what a fruitful scepticism; and finally and surprisingly, what a moral force and dignity.

For the inner personality of an artist is always to be found in his method of work, and in the idiosyncrasy of his technique. Throughout Mr. Maugham's work, from his earliest to his latest novel or play, the reader will be sensible of an elusive something, a hardness, a core of Roman stoicism, that can at times be terrifying in its remorseless asceticism. Principally it aims its barbs at self-indulgence, at the hypocrisy that tries to pass off self-interest as altruism; at all those languors and softnesses of the flesh which lead men and women to indolence and imposition upon others. The drone, the social parasite, the office-seeker, and the cultivator of limelight; these are the types whom his vitriolic genius bites into, like acid into base metal.

It may be that in time to come Mr. Maugham's savage irony, his corrosive satire, his exposures of the weaknesses of the flesh (exposures as sensual as the flesh they castigate), will take their place alongside the coarseness of Dean Swift; the fierceness of both artists being an armour against a world which they found too painful for the sensitive nervous systems in which their genius was clothed, as an ascetic used to be clothed in a hair shirt.

The book that most significantly reveals the whole gamut and the depths of this writer's personality is the novel *Of Human Bondage*. It is a long, discursive novel, that novel of an autobiographical cast which every major writer produces and makes the fulcrum upon which his literary life balances. Mr. Maugham wrote the first draft of this book in 1897-8. It was refused by several publishers, and the author put it aside for some years during which he became a famous dramatist. He then spent two years rewriting the book, and it was



*Howard Coster*

## SOMERSET MAUGHAM

published in 1915. It has made its way slowly into popularity, and it now stands as one of the major novels of our modern literature, along, in its degree, with such similarly conceived books as *David Copperfield*, *Sons and Lovers*, and *The Old Wives' Tale*. The reader may well ponder the fact that in this book, the central figure, the hero, is a man with a club foot, a being therefore out of the normal, who makes an unfair bid for sympathy by reason of his disability. Does this represent a weakness, a streak of sentimentality, in the philosophy of the writer? And is it this Achillean vulnerability which has determined his attitude towards human society? These questions, I think, are not fully answered in his autobiographical essay *The Summing Up*, published in 1938.

Mr. Maugham's most perfect novel, *Cakes and Ale*, is a tale about a famous novelist (said to be Thomas Hardy) and his young wife Rose. Rose is one of the most robust, lovable, and illogical women in English fiction. She is, perhaps, the only one of his creatures, with the possible exception of Sally in *Of Human Bondage*, whom the author has not splashed with the mordant fluid of his satire.

NOVELS: *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *Heinemann*; *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919); *The Painted Veil* (1925); *Cakes and Ale* (1930), *Dent (Everyman)*; *Christmas Holiday* (1939); *Up at a Villa* (1941). SHORT STORIES: *The Trembling of a Leaf* (1921); *First Person Singular* (1931). PLAYS: *Collected Plays* (1932), vols. 3, 5, and 5, *Heinemann*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Strictly Personal* (1941), *Heinemann*.

## MAURICE BARING

1874-1945

OF all modern British authors, Maurice Baring is the most difficult to write about. This is due, I think, to the incompatibility between his personality and his character. Dame Ethel Smyth, a devoted friend, turned from her own art of music to try to set down in a book her conclusions about this incompatibility. She regarded him as a great artist, and her careful analysis of his novels will be helpful to the reader who is making acquaintance for the first time with this elusive poet. Ethel Smyth also believed him to be a great man, and she tried to paint a word picture of him. What she shows is a person of rare charm, with a playful humour and a wayward attitude towards the conventions of life. The testimony of his two



great friends, Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton, bears out the truth of this portrait. I would add that Baring's own book, *The Puppet Show of Memory* amplifies the portrait. It is one of his most beautiful books.

Baring was born into a rich and influential family in 1874, the fourth son of Lord Revelstoke. He entered the diplomatic service in 1898 and served in the embassies in Paris, Copenhagen, and Rome. After some years he resigned, and became a war correspondent, working in Manchuria, Russia, and the Balkans. He served during the 1914 war,

and in 1925 was made a Wing-Commander. Round that framework, this bizarre and even eccentric character wove a fabric of events as colourful and decorative as anything in the Russian ballet. His aunt, Lady Ponsonby, relates a typical example of this picturesque way of living. She once remarked to him that she did not like him in pince-nez, and asked if he must really wear them. He replied, "I won't if you don't like them, darling," and flung them into the fire. No wonder that his "tearing spirits combined with what appeared to be an easy smiling irresponsibility caused many to look on him as a lovable and gifted lunatic."

But this side of the man, with his aristocratic eccentricities, his practical jokes, his indifference to the conventions and to the correct moves in career-making, does not appear in his writing. On the contrary, as soon as we come to the world of his art, we come to a bare, desolate land, whose beauties emerge only gradually, after we have become acclimatized. Both in verse and prose he wrote with a deliberate flatness, a drooping rhythm, as though a great weariness and desolation of spirit possessed him. The general aspect of his work is one of sadness, a deep sadness that is less active than pessimism, but more penetrating. It comes upon the soul of the reader, producing a sense of loneliness, of being face to face with oneself

## MAURICE BARING

and finding the company inadequate. It penetrates even further, and ends—or rather it does not end, for there is no end to this influence—by forcing the reader to a contact with Baring's own refuge from this desolation. His refuge was the Roman Catholic Church. The story of his conversion is laconic and terse, but it is devastating in its effect. (See *The Puppet Show of Memory*.)

But even with this sustenance, age-old, and with all the incidence of European culture which meant so much to the author, he could not escape from the Catullus-like despair which was part of his temperament. Below his social high spirits, deeper than his devout faith, moved this restless imagination. Its most tragic expression is found in the two great novels *C* and *The Coat without Seam*, and probably in *Cat's Cradle*. Behind his work lies the wide culture into which he was born. Behind that culture lies the desperate spirit looking in vain for certainty. The search has given his work a strange power, an almost hypnotic force that belies the laconic literary style which is its vehicle.

NOVELS: "C" (1924); *Cat's Cradle* (1925), *Heinemann*; *The Coat Without Seam* (1929), *Heinemann*. POEMS: *Selected Poems* (1930), *Heinemann*. PLAYS: *Diminutive Dramas* (1911), *Heinemann*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *The Puppet Show of Memory* (1922), *Heinemann*. ESSAYS: *Lost Diaries* (1913), *Duckworth*.

## JOHN BUCHAN

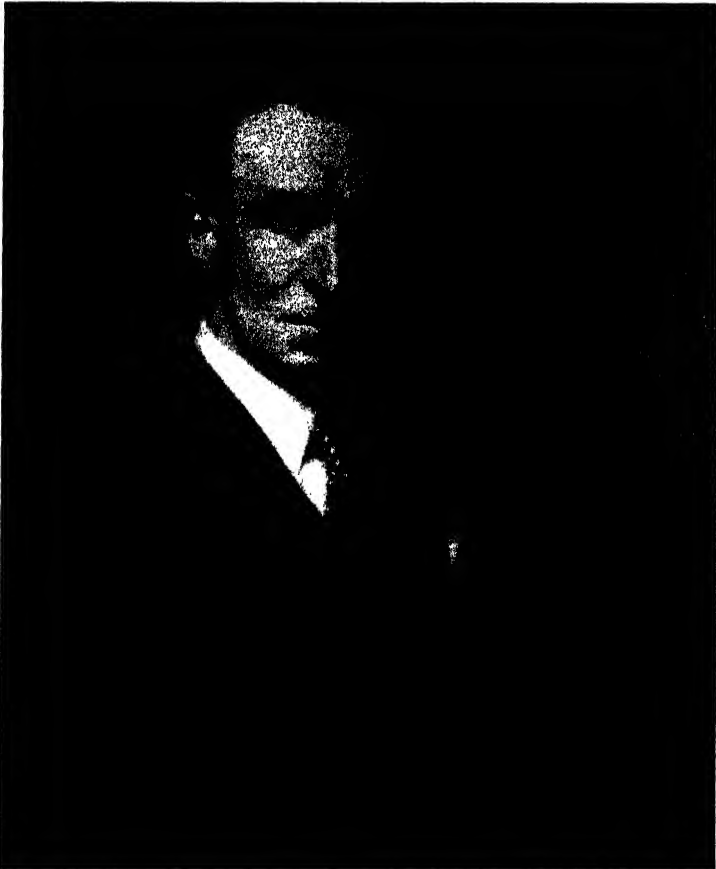
1875-1941

JOHN BUCHAN, who died in 1941, under a glare of public honours, was "a son of the manse". His life, like that of Mr. Churchill, had been one glorious tug-of-war between the man of action and the man of letters. His energy and achievement were enormous. His output exceeded that of many writers whose lives have been solely dedicated to the profession of letters. Yet, in addition to this, he followed a career in public affairs that was so demonstrative of character, so keen and close to reality, that he ended as Baron Tweedsmuir, Governor-General of Canada, a dignity which covered a host of lesser ones, such as the Chancellorship of Edinburgh University and a Privy Counsellorship. As Governor-General of Canada he made it his delight, in spite of age and increasing ill-health, to visit the remotest

## JOHN BUCHAN

parts of that vast Commonwealth, and to become one of the most popular and beloved representatives whom the King has ever sent there.

That popularity was precisely the one which he made all his life as a writer. It was due to his love of adventure, and his boyish delight in a struggle against adverse conditions. The discipline of the Scottish scholar, something unique, perhaps, in the history of European culture, is exemplified in John Buchan's personality. With a sound classical education he did well at Oxford, and established a method of thought and writing which served him lifelong. Its spareness, clarity, and suppleness were due partly to the traditions which he had imbibed during his education; partly to a natural



tendency in the man himself. In person, he looked as he wrote; thin, keen, with intense, almost gimlet eyes, a bony face with a pronounced nose and a fine, accented skull. He was like the Julius Cæsar about whom he wrote a short study in 1932. I think it is one of his best books because he wrote, perhaps unconsciously, a portrait of his own characteristics. The adventures and achievements of the great Roman General were such as he could fully appreciate. The iron discipline of self, the simplicity of habit, the methodical ordering of his own and other affairs, the patient recording of them; these were also significant of the events and rulings of John Buchan's own life.

In addition to this severely controlled self, however, there was another side to John Buchan. He was also a Scot in his love of the elfin, the mysterious. Constantly at his side as man of affairs and grave historian, danced a wilful self that broke silence far less frequently than many readers wished. It wrote poems, and it produced such tales of fantasy and imagination as *Witch Wood* and the famous *Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Greenmantle*.

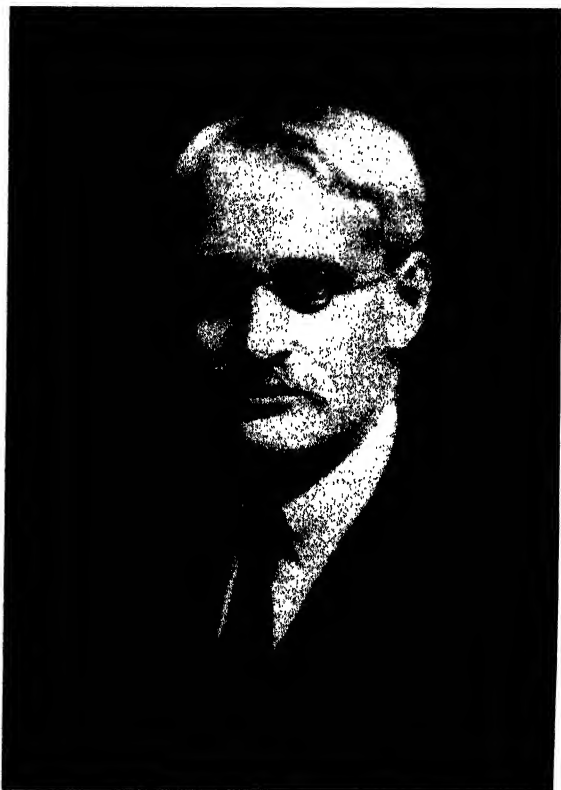
Buchan's historical writing is always colourful and associated with heroic figures. In that his romanticism ruled him. But not even the most scientific-economic reader will carp at a method which was so sincere, and so gracefully presented in the prose style of such admirable books as the *Montrose*, the *Oliver Cromwell*, the *Augustus*, and the *History of the Great War*.

NOVELS: Prester John (1910), *Nelson*; The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915); Greenmantle (1916), *Nelson*; Mr. Standfast (1919), *Hodder* (the above three books are included in "Sir Richard Hannay's Adventures", *Hodder*); Hunting-Tower (1922), *Hodder*; Midwinter (1923), *Hodder*; Witch Wood (1928), *Hodder*. BIOGRAPHY: Montrose (1928), *Hodder*; Julius Cæsar (1932); Sir Walter Scott (1933), *Cassell*; Oliver Cromwell (1934), *Hodder*; Augustus (1937), *Hodder*. HISTORY: History of the Great War (1921), *Nelson*, 4 vols.; Episodes of the Great War (1936); Naval Episodes of the Great War (1938). AUTOBIOGRAPHY: Memory Holds the Door (1941), *Hodder*.

## G. M. TREVELYAN

b. 1876

IN my comment on H. A. L. Fisher, I welcomed the inclusion of two historians amongst the literary figures discussed in this book. The other historian is George Macaulay Trevelyan, O.M. Born in



1876, he was educated in the best traditions of nineteenth century Liberalism. His father was also a historian and nephew of Lord Macaulay. His two elder brothers have also been distinguished, the one as a statesman and the other as a poet and translator from the Greek. He has been true to his early environment and his family outlook. He married the daughter of the famous Victorian novelist, Mrs. Humphrey Ward.

In his outlook as a historian he is more romantic than Fisher. Like his great kinsman Macaulay, he prefers to work more colourfully upon a restricted period. His first popular book, however, is his general *History of England*, published in 1926. It is to be compared with that published by John Richard Green in 1874. Green said of his own history that "it is a history, not of English Kings or English Conquests, but of the English people." The same may be said of Trevelyan's work. In particular, he has taken pains to investigate the contribution made to the constitution of that English people by the



Anglo-Saxon element. He has a natural love of the island which has condensed so much history within its shores, and in his public life he has connected himself with all those institutions, such as the National Trust, whose purpose is to preserve from the hand of the industrial barbarian those beauties of natural scene and human relic which still survive.

The picture of England before the Norman Conquest is one of the most vivid and enjoyable parts of Mr. Trevelyan's history. It might be read before his *England in the Age of Wycliffe*. He has written much, however, of the later period covered by the work of his great-uncle, but he has managed to escape from the shadow of his kinsman, and to give his work a personal quality. Try *The English Revolution, 1688*, a theme snatched from the very heart of Macaulay's territory. You will already have enjoyed his *Social History of England*.

Mr. Trevelyan's romantic vein is not confined to home. He is a lover of Italy, and in particular of Garibaldi, about whom he has written three books. His biographical studies allow him even more scope for his love of warm detail, as will be seen from his *Life of John Bright*, his memoir on his father, Sir George Otto Trevelyan, and his *Grey of Fallodon*. Grey was a character in whom he could delight; the statesman, the naturalist, the scholar, the last representative of that great Liberal tradition which inherited from the Whigs of the eighteenth century, a tradition believing in an aristocracy of intellect based upon an authority of moral order.

HISTORY: *England in the Age of Wycliffe* (1907); *England under the Stuarts* (1907), *Methuen*; *History of England* (1926), *Longmans*; *England under Queen Anne* (1930-4), *Longmans*, 3 vols.; *English Social History* (1944) *Longmans*. BIOGRAPHY: *The Life of John Bright* (1925), *Constable*; *Grey of Fallodon* (1937), *Longmans*.

## JOHN MASEFIELD

b. 1878

JOHN MASEFIELD, born in Herefordshire in 1878, has had a career marked by extreme reactions, both in his work and in the public response to it. There has never been any half-measure about the criticism of his poetry, and the reason for this is in the poetry itself.

The complication begins in the conflict between the circumstances

JOHN MASEFIELD

of his life and his personality. The early death of his father threw him at an early age into the world. After a training on the ship *Conway* (a school for the British Merchant Service) he went to sea and served before the mast. Then for two years he earned his living in America, at one time working in a carpet factory (an adventure which he has recorded in an autobiographical study called *In the Mill*, a book of characteristic spareness and beauty). After that he came to England again, determined to find fame and fortune as a writer. He succeeded, but it took a long time.

For years he worked as a journalist, and learned a technique of quick, nervous prose which has affected the whole of his literary activities. During that time he published several books of verse, the most notable being *Salt-water Ballads* in 1902. Success came, however, in 1911, when a long narrative poem called *The Everlasting Mercy* appeared in *The English Review*. That issue of a sober periodical had to be reprinted several times. Masefield had achieved the impossible. He had made the great British public read contemporary poetry, an event which had not occurred since the death of Tennyson. This success he followed up with several other long poems in a like manner: *The Widow in the Bye Street*, *Dauber*, and others, which culminated some years later (1919) in the best in this manner with *Reynard the Fox*.

During this time, other lyrical and occasional poetry poured from his pen. In 1923 a volume called *Collected Poems* appeared, and it has sold some two hundred thousand copies. But his work has overflowed that volume as a fountain overflows a wine-bottle. In addition to this, his output in prose has been prolific, and in later years has tended to exceed his work in verse. Novels, tales of adventure, plays, short stories and books for boys, essays and studies of matters military, personal, and literary, make up a bibliography which is enormous. Such industry, in such quality, following so great an initial success, has kept him abreast of the tide of letters. He has been awarded honorary degrees, has been made Poet Laureate in succession to the late Robert Bridges, and finally has been honoured with the Order of Merit, the highest distinction which Britain can offer to one of her sons.

He deserves this recognition, and I believe that time will show approval by allowing much of his prose and verse to survive. For there is throughout his work one quality which does not date, and which belongs to no fashion. It is *fervour*. Hardly a poem amongst his huge collection is unmarked by it. It sweeps through all he has



*Pictorial Press*

John Masefield, Poet Laureate, building a model ship of his own design

## JOHN MASEFIELD

written like a mighty south-west wind, spiced and laden with sea-salt. He has written much of the sea and sailors; but his writing about the land, and the remote country of the human soul, is just as tonic and invigorating. His early work, indeed, was blown to pieces by that fervour. He had no time for self-criticism and the perfecting of his technique. Much of his verse is loose in structure, journalistic, and sometimes emotionally over-emphasized and feverish. He slapdashed his effects, and dealt in crude emotions. His outlook has always been direct, that of a boy or a sailor. He has worshipped woman in a purely uncritical and unintimate way, saying, "Kneel to the beautiful women who bear us this strange brave fruit." It is colourful, but unsubtle.

Later, however, and especially in his prose, this exuberance has cooled down to a laconic terseness. His recent tales have the same directness as the early ones, but age has given his objectiveness a variety and a more intricate perception. But it has not robbed him of his boyish clarity of vision, and his capacity for delight.

POEMS: Salt Water Ballads (1902); The Everlasting Mercy (1911), *Sidgwick*; The Widow in the Bye Street (1912), *Sidgwick*; Dauber (1913), *Heinemann*; Good Friday (1915); Reynard the Fox (1919), *Heinemann*; Collected Poems (1932), *Heinemann*. NOVELS: Sard Harker (1924); Odtaa (1926); Basilissa (1940), *Heinemann*. HISTORY: Gallipoli (1916); The Nine Days' Wonder (1941). CRITICISM: Shakespeare and the Spiritual Life (1929), *O.U.P.* AUTOBIOGRAPHY: In the Mill (1941), *Heinemann*.

## ROBERT LYND

b. 1879

THE art of the essay, which was so popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, has fallen upon neglectful days. Few British publishers to-day care to venture with little volumes of musings, personal causeries, whimsical reflections upon life and letters. They know that such publications are little more profitable than books of verse. Therefore essayists are not welcomed at their doors.

There are one or two exceptions, however, and of these few practitioners of a graceful art—perhaps the last of the arts of a civilization of leisure—the most outstanding is Robert Lynd, who was also widely



known as "YY" because of his weekly essay in *The New Statesman and Nation*.

It is characteristic of Robert Lynd to be timeless. Born in 1879, son of an Ulster divine, he might have been an obvious survival from the 'nineties. But he is no such thing. He might, again, have been one of the Fabian reformers, or a maker of Edwardian Utopias, working in the drawing office of H. G. Wells. Again he is no such thing. He might have bided his time, and emerged eventually amongst the intellectuals of Bloomsbury, helping them to purvey their

culture in small packets like desiccated soup. But he was not in that *galère* either.

What then, is he? He is Robert Lynd. He writes as though he still has infinite leisure, yet most of it has been done while he was the literary editor of one of our daily papers, and had to spend much of his time in Fleet Street. And he had to farm out a half of his personality and energy to that other self, "YY", whose weekly commentary upon passing events and flotsam and jetsam accumulated through the passage of over twenty years into a philosophy of life.

A philosophy of life, a retention of the spirit of leisure; these are the garments which this essayist wears with a negligence, like a favourite old coat. Time and experience have made that coat fit his personality so loosely that it belongs much more to the man than to the tailor. The pockets bulge, the seams are patched. It is Robert Lynd's coat, and would be recognized if he left it lying about.

What, then, one may ask again, is this pervading personality? One of his volumes of collected essays is called *In Defence of Pink*. It

## ROBERT LYND

suggests a mental attitude of sitting on the fence, of a temporizing liberalism. But that is said of Lynd and is at once known by the speaker to be wrong, inadequate. Give Lynd a label and he will be sure to mislay it. I should prefer to say that his advocacy of "pinkness" is a plea for tolerance. Indeed, he has made a technical device of tolerance. Examine his essays, and you will see how he builds up an argument by a skilful illustration of exceptions; how he reabsorbs those exceptions, and closes down with a neat, swift stroke that shows no temporizing hand. With all his tolerance, Lynd is implacable in his detestation of bunkum and brutality. His taste is unerring. As a critic of morals and art he is stable because he knows his own instincts and their foundations in a tradition which he can defend fully and consciously. Sanity, a deep, penetrating humour born from a love of his fellowmen, a quick appreciation of nature, these are faculties of an essayist who perhaps pleases himself in being deceptive. His depth, like that of a clear pool into which the sun is shining, is greater than it seems. Such is Robert Lynd, still eluding the critic.

ESSAYS: Art and Letters (1921), *Duckworth*; The Pleasures of Ignorance (1928), *Methuen*; Dr. Johnson and Company (1928), *Hodder*; Books and Authors (1929), *Cape*; Both Sides of the Road (1934), *Methuen*; Searchlights and Nightingales (1939), *Dent*; Selected Essays (1923), *Dent*.

## LYTTON STRACHEY

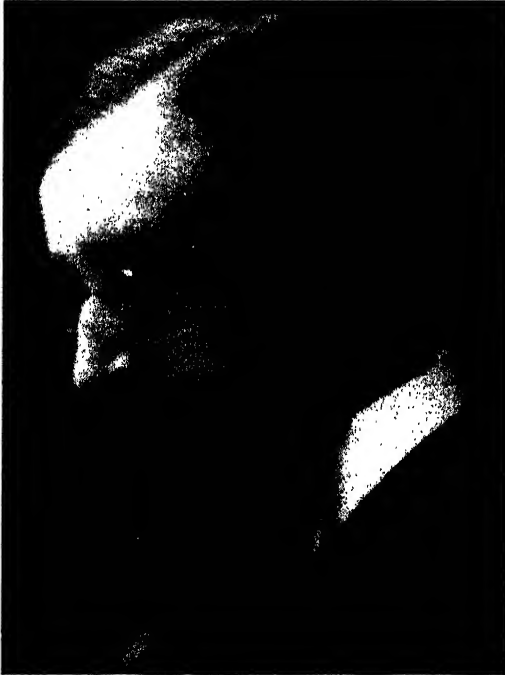
1880-1932

THROUGHOUT the nineteenth century the art of biography in Britain was little more than an extension of that employed by the monumental mason, who buried his subject under a weight of marble angels and urns filled with artificial flowers. The two or three volume "official" records of the lives of the great moved in procession to the lending libraries shortly after the earlier procession of each distinguished corpse to the cemetery. Only the virtues of the dead were touched upon, and if there happened to be no virtues, certain stage-properties of biography could be drawn upon.

In 1907 this technique was rudely broken by Edmund Gosse, with his cruelly skilful pen portrait of his father, in *Father and Son*. Nobody followed this lead until in 1918 Lytton Strachey published *Eminent Victorians*, a gallery of portraits of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and General Gordon,

## LYTTON STRACHEY

figures artfully selected as representative of the outstanding characteristics of our national temper during the nineteenth century. The portraits were prefaced with a challenge to the old method of "official" biography in which Strachey pointed out that "if the historian is wise, he will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined."



In the hands of this gifted and fastidious writer, that method was triumphant. Strachey, compelled by an invalid physical constitution to remain a spectator of life, was already thirty-eight and intellectually mature when he launched this challenge upon our British tradition of piety towards the eminent dead. The result was electric. London's intelligentsia rose and dedicated their fountain pens to this new crusade, self-consciously diluting their ink with

vitriol. But though they used the same ammunition, they could not direct it with the same accuracy and skill. Most of them were too indiscriminate and too vehement, so that finally the whole method fell into disrepute, and the crusade collapsed.

Strachey's own work, however, remains because within its limits it is the product of a master-hand. Those limits are suggested in the legend which survives in minds trained to that recollection by Strachey himself. It is said that when, during the last war, he appeared before the Military Tribunal, he produced and blew up with pedantic solemnity, a rubber cushion, upon which he allowed his long, hypochondriac body to rest before he gave his attention to the court. Given that somewhat dyspeptic removal from the rough

## LYTTON STRACHEY

and tumble of life, Strachey's mind worked with devastating selectiveness. His prose, as drawn and languid as his physical articulations, accumulated strength, like the silken threads that tied down Gulliver in the land of Lilliput. It reached its most perfect achievement in his next study, *Queen Victoria* (1921). Here his ability to combine affection for his subject with a ironic selection of its aspects found full scope. *Queen Victoria* is a model of its kind, and has influenced biographers variously gifted, such as the robust and witty Philip Guedalla, and the gentle Lord David Cecil.

So complete was this literary success, so finely rounded off, that the author hesitated to follow it up. Seven years passed before he published *Elizabeth and Essex*, but by this time the rubber cushion of his vitality was already deflating. Further, he proved to be uneasy and confused in the garish and violent world of the Renaissance, whereas he had been confident amongst the antimacassars of the Victorian era. *Queen Victoria* remained his masterpiece. As a literary critic he was inclined to the most civilized and artficed of work. His *Landmarks in French Literature* contains perhaps the most illuminating study of Racine ever written by an Englishman.

BIOGRAPHY: Eminent Victorians (1918), *Chatto*; Queen Victoria (1921), *Chatto*; Elizabeth and Essex (1928), *Chatto*; Portraits in Miniature (1931), *Chatto*. ESSAYS: Landmarks in French Literature (1912), *O.U.P.*; Books and Characters, French and English (1922), *Chatto*.

## VIRGINIA WOOLF

1882-1941

AN intellectual aristocracy is one which is likely to outlast any other kind of exclusiveness. Landed proprietors and plutocrats may vanish from the structure of human society, but snobbery will always find a niche. This on moral and humane grounds is to be regretted. Artistically, it has always produced certain exquisite results. Much of the finest literature of the eighteenth century was made within such an enclosure, and in our own time we have the productions of the Bloomsbury school, known to an irreverent outside world as the Highbrows. Their goddess, their Pallas Athena, was Virginia Woolf.



## VIRGINIA WOOLF

By birth and upbringing she was trained for the part. Born in 1882, she was the daughter of a pivotal literary figure of the later Victorian age, Sir Leslie Stephen, editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. She was related both to the Darwin and the Strachey families. Her early life at home in London was thus saturated in culture. The great writers of that day frequented her father's house, and she sat at their feet. When in 1915 she published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, the influence of one of those early mentors, George Meredith, was plain. But even in this first essay in fiction, Virginia Woolf's originality shone with that elusive, amber glow which never left her work. From this beginning, her work offered a challenge to the accepted canons of the technique of fiction writing. Bloomsbury supported that challenge, and before her second book appeared, she was already the mascot of the school of critics who proposed to carry the methods of the French impressionist painters into the making of English novels.

Controversy was inevitable, for Mrs. Woolf's work, as it developed along its own line, tended more and more to outstrip the understanding of the general reader. That tendency is too subtle, of too complicated an origin, to be discussed briefly here. A profound examination of æsthetic is involved. Sufficient to say that Mrs. Woolf, by precept and example, challenged the realistic school of fiction, in which character is the predominant feature; character seen from the outside, and judged by its action and environment rather than by the mystery of personality from which it springs. Mrs. Woolf went even beyond personality. She wanted to dissociate emotion and even physical sensation altogether from individual identity. The *people* in her books tended to dissolve into a general mist of sensibility, and this solution, compounded of human nature and the beauties, terrors, substances, and essences of the universe at large, was held up by her fragile hand against the light of the sun.

She was, in short, completely feminine in her work. She distrusted architecture, and was bored with the making of bricks. She thus made her stories by a deliberate avoidance of monumental stability. In this, she followed Proust and Dorothy Richardson, but she did it with a delicate, keen-sighted artistry that gave her work a tantalisingly contradictory quality. Here was a body of novels that avoided story, characterization, crisis. Little of them could be remembered after reading. Yet in the reading, detail after detail went by under an intense light, the light of a mind stripped of illusion and clumsiness.



Drawing by Francis Dodd

## VIRGINIA WOOLF

Further, the author's senses worked with that added intensity which one feels in convalescence, during the first walk after a long illness. The world looks diminished, intensified, everything framed and isolated. That abnormal appreciation of the passing phenomenon is expressed by Virginia Woolf in a prose as lucid as her vision. Her work is therefore something new in English letters, something which even her own idolators cannot spoil.

NOVELS: *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Hogarth*; *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Dent (Everyman)*; *The Waves* (1931), *Hogarth*; *The Years* (1937), *Hogarth*.  
ESSAYS: *The Common Reader* (1925); *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Hogarth*; *Walter Sickert: a Conversation* (1934), *Hogarth*.  
BIOGRAPHY: *Flush* (1933), *Hogarth*; *Roger Fry* (1940), *Hogarth*.

## ARTHUR STANLEY EDDINGTON 1882-1944

A MATHEMATICIAN of international fame, Dr. G. H. Hardy, has said that mathematics is a mental activity practised successfully only by young people, and that its genius, its revelations, rarely visit the ageing mind. This pronouncement, doubtless made in the weariness and humility of spirit that accompany a life of dedication, is one which might apply to the other two great systems of symbolism, music and poetry. Certainly these two last have a substantiality in human nature, and are thus able to be fed from personal experience in the everyday world. But even so, their practice involves that constant strain which is always to be felt, as though it were a law of nature, between the symbol and the substance.

We escape, for the moment, from this sad contemplation, by remembering the life and work of Sir Arthur Eddington, O.M. The passing of the years did not rob this great mathematician and physicist of his ability for wandering, like the young Newton, "through strange seas of thought, alone". With Professor A. N. Whitehead, he did much to keep the whole philosophic and physical field of knowledge impregnated with the experimental ideas of relativity. His work is beyond the comprehension of the layman,

ARTHUR STANLEY EDDINGTON

and I, as one of them, have no competence to say much about it here. I can only point to its importance, and to the part he played in carrying the new ideas into the realms of everyday thought and even everyday conduct. For the idea of Relativity is a profound



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moral and ethical force. It is an explosive which is still in process of blowing up the foundations of the Aristotelean world upon which the Christian civilization has hitherto shaped itself.

Eddington's work as an astronomer can be appreciated only by the specialist. His speculations on the evolution of rotating masses, and of the give and take of energy by the constituent gases of stars (a matter involving their gravitational force and process) are probably

amongst the most original and valuable of his contributions to science. He is more popularly known as an exponent of the theory of Relativity, and his work in this hardly more tangible area has made his name a household word, together with that of Einstein, whose genius he served so humbly yet so independently.

Born in 1882, he soon showed his mathematical bent (in this matter running true to type, for the mathematical gift is usually a precocious one). At the age of twenty-five he was already a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, having been Senior Wrangler three years earlier. Official recognition, both in his own country and abroad, has been lavish. Universities all over the world awarded him honorary degrees. He was knighted in 1930, and given the Order of Merit in 1938.

The book which introduced him to the larger public was published in 1928, the year in which he was awarded the Medal of the Royal Society. Its title, *The Nature of the Physical World*, explains its purpose. It is written in a style as simple and lucid as the nature of the work permits. Its aim is to explain to the ordinary citizen where man now stands in his knowledge of the universe. The effort is almost superhuman, so technical has science become during the past fifty years, and so mysterious in its symbolism. He succeeds in conducting the reader beyond the barrier of the atom, that conception hitherto the boundary of all physical knowledge, and he makes it clear how "the external world of physics has thus become a world of shadows". This is startling enough, and it looks as though he is about to lead us back into the arms of the philosopher Berkeley, once so condignly rejected by Dr. Johnson, the apostle of common-sense. But Professor Eddington has now the equipment to steer clear of the fogs of subjectivism. "Science aims," he says, "at constructing a world which shall be symbolic of the world of commonplace experience." And his whole emphasis is upon that symbolism. He insists upon its artificiality, which he compares with that of the alphabet. But he follows this by showing how the human mind, in a miraculous act inexplicable by science, can endow that latter-day symbolism, as it has endowed the alphabet, with a living substantiality nearer to the final and time-surviving reality of all things, than matter can ever be. So escaping the dangers of subjectivism, he leads us nearer to that sublime vision by which Spinoza, three hundred years ago, unified the worlds of being and of appearance. But now the process is, in a manner, factual, and one that the practical man can follow. Let us hope that the practical man will not abuse the privilege.

ARTHUR STANLEY EDDINGTON

SCIENCE: Stars and Atoms (1927), *O.U.P.*; The Nature of the Physical World (1928), *Dent (Everyman)*; Science and the Unseen World (1929), *Unwin*; The Expanding Universe (1933), *C.U.P.*

COMPTON MACKENZIE

b. 1883

THERE was a period, a phase, in British intellectual and emotional life which we might call the Nineteen-tens. It produced the generation which went to the war of 1914-18, and its remnants returned to a world that had begun to crumble. Their war-blunted hands could not prevent it from disintegrating. It had been a highly sensitive and sophisticated generation, kindled to poetic ambition by its three years at Oxford or Cambridge. Rupert Brooke was one of its most outstanding sons.

Its spokesman was Compton Mackenzie. He was well equipped for the task. Its sensitiveness, its aesthetic consciousness, were summed up in his personality and inheritance.



## COMPTON MACKENZIE

He was a child of the theatre. Born in 1883, he was the son of Edward Compton, a celebrated actor, and of the American, Virginia Bateman, who came of a famous family of actors and actresses. John Addington Symonds, and John Birkbeck Hill, two distinguished literary figures of the Victorian era, were relatives. So the young man who came down from Oxford (an Oxford undergoing a precious and "poetic" phase) just before the 1914 war, was richly endowed. He spent the first handful of his riches in writing a play, *The Gentleman in Grey*, which was produced in Edinburgh in 1907. Four years later his first novel, *The Passionate Elopement*, appeared, and was well received. In 1912, however, a large and enthusiastic public began to take notice of him after the publication of his novel of theatre life. *Carnival* showed all the characteristics which he has ever since retained. It has a wild vein of humour and wilful fancy, a rollicking sense of farce, a faculty for portraying Cockney types of the more raffish kind, and above all, a rich and glamorous delight in the theatre and all that pertains to it (even including theatrical lodgings and the shabby bohemianism enforced by the economics of the profession).

From this somewhat highly coloured world, Compton Mackenzie next turned to a more interior one. But he presented it with the same faculty for dramatic intensity. In *Sinister Street*, a novel in two volumes, he projects himself from childhood to the threshold of manhood, including the almost fatal years at the university. The book started a new vogue of novels claiming to reveal the inner workings of the adolescent soul during its desperate adventures at public school and university. But none of them had the quality of *Sinister Street*, which transcended the individual experience of the author, and spoke for the whole of his generation, with its sense of *fin de siècle*, of weariness, of nostalgia for it knew not what, of wrestlings with the ambition for self-expression and a means of escape from the mechanization which appeared to be clamping down on society, even that lucky section of society which could afford to spend the impressionable years of youth at public school and university.

As an appendage to *Sinister Street*, the versatile author wrote *Guy and Pauline*, a romance laid in the West Country during a spring, summer and autumn of one of those years of indecision when youth has just come down from college and is waiting to begin the task of living. It is a book through which thistledown floats. It is lush with water-scenes round the cottage called, characteristically, *Plashers*

## COMPTON MACKENZIE

Mead, where the young man and the maid wake shyly to first love. It is absurd, exquisite, lovely, and heart-breakingly sad.

But war came, and interrupted such flute-music. Compton Mackenzie turned his romanticism to more active purposes. He went out to the Mediterranean and was engaged in Secret Service work, a role which suited him. He made the most of it. He made it more even than it purports to be in fiction, as his subsequent volumes of Memoirs show. He is a colourful figure in the British literary scene.

NOVELS: *The Passionate Elopement* (1911); *Carnival* (1912); *Sinister Street* (1913); *Guy and Pauline* (1914), *O.U.P.*; *Sylvia Scarlett* (1917); *Poor Relations* (1919); *Rich Relations* (1920); *The Four Winds of Love* (1937), *Rich & Cowan*, 4 vols. MEMOIRS: *Gallipoli Memories* (1929); *Greek Memories* (1932), *Chatto*.

## HUGH WALPOLE

1884-1941

SIR HUGH WALPOLE, who died in 1941 at the age of fifty-seven has had one of the most full and successful lives of any contemporary British writer. He had no early struggle, at least against circumstances. The son of a Bishop of Edinburgh, he was in comfortable quarters all his life, and knew nothing of poverty, social humiliation, and the difficulties of self-education. In consequence, he appeared as a man of open and generous disposition, in after years shining as a warm patron of younger writers, and an active statesman on the political side of the world of letters. He was knighted in 1937. Yet after his death, the obituary notices were almost uniformly severe and even hostile. The critics seemed to be united in an instinctive feeling that Walpole had done a little too well out of a limited talent.

That talent, however, was considerable and it did not fail him during the whole of his literary activity. Early in life he set out to be a professional writer, and he maintained this industry to the end. It is a worthy aim, especially in a time when so many dabblers and amateurs in the art tend to lower the standard of craftsmanship.



Walpole aimed principally at telling a good story objectively and directly, believing that his open and hearty nature would carry him through in this Balzac-like ambition. But he over-estimated his own simplicity. He was not so candid, so open-natured as he imagined. Running through his genial fecundity was a streak of something odd, perverse, suspicious. It took the form of queer subterfuges, and in its extreme manifestation gave to his work a touch of horror, of cruelty, which reacted upon the author and made him over-emotional and even hysterical.

This, however, did not interfere with his popularity as a novelist. Maybe it hastened his success by stamping his work with an originality which it would not otherwise possess. For he had little poetic vision, and no poetic verbal gift, to distinguish his work from that of a good journeyman storyteller.

As a storyteller he was capital. His tales are all persuasive to read, and their variety of theme is a sign of his range of interest and



enthusiasm. He published his first novel, *The Wooden Horse*, in 1909, and success came with his third book, *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*, in 1911. This book, considered by many critics to be his best, also shows that equivocal, anti-social side of him in a marked degree. A tale of life among the masters of a school, it pictures to what depth of furtiveness, meanness, and futility the relationships in a community of men can descend.

## HUGH WALPOLE

During the 1914–18 war Walpole served on the Russian Red Cross, and this experience, by bringing him into contact with Russian culture and literature, enabled him more consciously to understand the darker side of his nature, and to bring it under control. His novel, *The Dark Forest*, is an example of that synthesis.

Meanwhile, the sunnier side of his nature expanded. Novels in the manner of Anthony Trollope (*The Cathedral* and *The Old Ladies*), led to an ambitious work in several volumes. This saga, called *The Herries Chronicle*, is a complex of four tales laid in the Lake District of England, and covering a period of over a century, and several generations of a Lakeland family against a scenic and historical background painted in the manner of Sir Walter Scott. It has been enormously popular, and the Lakes of England are not infrequently referred to as "The Herries Country", just as Wessex is sometimes called "The Hardy Country".

It is still too soon to estimate what place, if any, Walpole will take in the Pantheon of English letters. He remains at present a puzzling figure, sunny and expansive on one side, slightly sinister on the other.

NOVELS: *The Wooden Horse* (1909), *Dent*; *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* (1911), *Dent (Everyman)*; *Fortitude* (1913); *The Dark Forest* (1916), *Macmillan*; *The Cathedral* (1922), *Macmillan*; *The Old Ladies* (1924), *Macmillan*; *Wintersmoon* (1928), *Macmillan*; *The Herries Chronicle* (1939), *Macmillan*; *Blind Man's House* (1941), *Macmillan*.

## FRANK SWINNERTON

b. 1884

PERHAPS, to readers abroad who wish to understand the English scene and character, the main attraction of Frank Swinnerton's books will be their faithful portraiture of London and its people. He is the Londoner *par excellence*. There have been, and are, Cockney writers, who put on record the whimsies and broad humour, the appalling toneless dialect, the communal habits of the Cockney. But such work does not include the less picturesque but larger and more representative life of the obscure millions who have neither *patois* nor pearl buttons to make them immediately recognizable. These Londoners, who inhabit the vast suburbs and those self-contained

villages still to be found in the heart of the greatest city in the world, are a body of people with a tradition of quietness and persistence. That tradition has resisted tyrants, and it has taught kings that constitutionalism is the best policy. It has resisted all extremes, its weapons being obstinacy and ridicule. Its strength is in its passiveness and humility. During the war of 1914-18, the anonymous Londoner did much towards the smashing of the German military machine. To-day, with much of his tangible history in ruins round him, that Londoner still defies excess, bombast, and arrogance.

This then, is the character for whom Frank Swinnerton is the spokesman. He is himself a representative Londoner. He was born in Wood Green in 1884, but spent his childhood and youth in Clerkenwell, at the centre of London. At that time the capital had not begun to show signs of being cosmopolitan. It was then still the city which Dickens had pictured, with its filth, its chophouses, its puritanism and its pints of porter. Swinnerton came of a stock of fine craftsmen. His grandfather was a glass-cutter, and his father a copper-engraver. In his work he shows the perfect combination of heredity and environment. His novels are models of craftsmanship. No modern novelist, not even Arnold Bennett, whom he acknowledges as his master, is more patient, deliberate, and skilful in the building of a book's general structure, or more modest an artist in the handling of prose. Such devotion and subordination of self must surely have been handed down to him by his forebears. So much for his technique.

What of the content of his work? Here, the tradition amid which he was born has shown its influence. The quiet tolerance shown by the Londoner, his suspicion of dogma, theory, and even of ideals; his shrewdness, quickness of perception (especially in estimating character); these are qualities which inform the novels and criticism of Frank Swinnerton. He says of himself, "I observe many conventions from politeness, because I live among other people and do not wish to offend their sensitiveness; but the conventions mean nothing to me. . . . I am not interested in politics; a piece of good fortune for everybody, including myself. But politics involve dogmas, and in my view dogmas are the devil. I am only interested in any subject in the degree to which it *illuminates* human nature. . . . I do not despise the intellect, but I dislike every form of exhibitionism and self-importance. And I have always written, not for the market, and not for the trifling prestige of a cliqué, but because the lives of what are called ordinary people have interested me more than anything else."



*Press Portrait Bureau*

## FRANK SWINNERTON

In that, he is a creature of his environment, a true Londoner. But he is something more, something perhaps which he would not claim as having achieved. In all his novels he shows an intensity of moral force that rises to great beauty. Evil and charity take on visible embodiment in his work, through a variety of characters, all owing something in their constitution to the genius of London, which broods over Swinnerton's work as it broods over that of Dickens and George Gissing. But more than either of these, I should say that he has entered into the almost inexpressible day to day spirit of London and its people. In this, he has done for his native city what Georges Duhamel has done for Paris. The achievement is not one which can be easily estimated, for the substance which it handles is imponderable.

There is also a practical side to Swinnerton's life and work. He has spent the whole of his working life in the literary world. He began as an office boy in a publisher's showroom, and during his servitude he educated himself and began to write. Fame and success came with his short novel *Nocturne*, in 1917. He has been publisher's reader and star reviewer, two occupations which between them cover the whole field of literary disillusionment. His enthusiasm has survived. He is still a creative writer.

NOVELS: *The Three Lovers* (1923); *Summer Storm* (1926); *The Two Wives* (1939); *The Fortunate Lady* (1941), *Hutchinson*; *The Thankless Child* (1942), *Hutchinson*. CRITICAL STUDIES: *A London Bookman* (1928), *Secker*; *The Georgian Literary Scene* (1935), *Dent (Everyman)*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Swinnerton* (1937), *Hutchinson*.

## FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

b. 1884

IF a reader from abroad should ask me to recommend a novelist who presents the English scene in its more serene aspects, I should at once urge upon him the Worcestershire tales of Francis Brett Young. Here is a writer about whom there has never been excited discussion, because his gifts are so ample and so patent.

Born in 1884 in the rural Midlands of Worcestershire, he grew up in a countryside such as Shakespeare knew, amongst the most gentle and generous beauty which our island can offer. It affected him as it affected the mightier genius, by endowing his nature with a lyrical



Portrait by Cathleen Mann (the Marchioness of Queensberry)

spontaneity, a warm sensuous delight, that no later drama, no social conflict and no individual sense of tragedy have been able to overlay. It is notable that Brett Young began his mature life with two activities, those of doctor and poet. These two approaches to life have given him a double source of supply for the later creation of his long list of novels, in which realism, a close knowledge of the material workings of English social life, is blended with a more removed contemplation that sees his characters against, and partaking of, the background of hills, rivers, meadows, cottages, and gardens, and pleasant old country mansions, which this author presents with a grace that reminds me of the water-colours of David Cox. His books are so rich in this atmospheric quality that a sort of natural melancholy impregnates them, and the reader is caught by a poignant nostalgia such as a lovely spring day sometimes evokes, when the blue sky, the returning swallows, the first cuckoo-shout, come upon the senses with a rapture that is also a sadness.

Brett Young is no dynamic writer. His prose is calm and serene, moving with deliberation like the dawning tide of green over a larch-wood. In that same way, he works as it were from *within* his characters, and his scene and events; his instrument a close, poetic sympathy that expands from the heart of his theme, whence he starts by intuition, depending upon expansiveness to convey his discovery to the reader. The most perfect example of his method is to be found in the long novel *Portrait of Clare*, which in 1927 won him the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. In its essential Englishness, it is comparable with Thomas Hardy's *Woodlanders* and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. All three works have a quality in common that must be missed by a reader who has not known the English countryside, its ancient kindness and customs, its intense verdure. "To a green thought in a green shade" is a famous line of poetry that perhaps sums up this quality.

But that is not the only aspect of Brett Young. His sympathy is not merely picturesque and atmospheric. His sensuousness creeps also into spiritual things. *Portrait of Clare* contains also two other outstanding qualities that will be found in all his books. The first is his gift for portraying young love. In his delicacy and tenderness of handling this theme, where knowledge dawns upon the adolescent mind, and Aucassin and Nicolette plight their troth against the evils of the world, Mr. Brett Young has no equal to-day, and has indeed achieved something unique in our British fiction. The second quality is his power of handling the shadows of life. This same

## FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

novel has many scenes laid in the sweated trade of chain making, when before the intervention of the Trade Board Acts women and children worked in their homes, filthy slum cottages, forging the links of chains by hand in surroundings not fit for animals to live in. Those scenes, too, are unforgettable as Mr. Brett Young presents them.

Finally, as a result of his experience during the last war, when he went as a military doctor to Rhodesia, he has given us *Marching on Tanga*, and such novels as *The City of Gold*, wherein he shows his capacity for handling a tale of warfare, and the nation-wide movements of a people seeking freedom and a new world where nature may once again be conquered and given that mellow, historical patina to which Mr. Brett Young's nature so intimately responds.

NOVELS: *The Dark Tower* (1915); *The Young Physician* (1919); *Portrait of Clare* (1927); *Dr. Bradley Remembers* (1938); *The City of Gold* (1939); *Cotswold Honey* (1940). MEMOIRS: *Marching on Tanga* (1917), *Collins*.

## D. H. LAWRENCE

1885-1930

ALREADY a large literature has accumulated around the work and personality of David Herbert Lawrence. His impact upon society, and especially literary society, was so strange, so violent, that controversy and partisanship still obscure the reader's judgment.

Born in 1885, Lawrence was reared during the ugliest period of English culture, in the ugliest part of England. He was the child of a Nottinghamshire coal-miner, and the conditions of his early life were primitive and spartan. The only tenderness that he knew was the love which his mother lavished upon him. Thus he was forced into an abnormally close relationship with her (a common psychological factor in the lives of the poor) from which he never escaped. It became a prison from which he was always trying to escape. But always it symbolized for him the beauty, the significance of love, which he could find nowhere else in a world of brutality and filth.

With this early bias, he developed rapidly, for he was born with abnormal intellectual faculties. Not enough attention has been paid to that fact. At thirteen, he won a scholarship to a secondary school, and thence to Nottingham University. For some years he was a



teacher, but he set out to be a professional writer after the publication of his first novel, *The White Peacock*, in 1911. He soon attracted notice, and made many literary friends, all of whom he treated with suspicion. He never saw human society, and especially cultured society, as anything other than a conspiracy for patronizing and subtly insulting him. This attitude is not unusual in a self-made man, but with Lawrence it was aggravated by his abnormal sensibility, his knowledge of his own power, and the irritability caused by the tubercular body in which his spirit was so miserably housed. His conduct towards his friends, and especially to those who tried to help him, was cavalier. He made a principle of biting the hands that tried to feed him. And the curious thing is that he loved those friends none the less, while they were grateful to accept his abuse.

In fact, his personality was noble, austere, and marked by such charm that the worst bouts of his aggravating manners could not shake the devotion of those who knew him and recognized the genius that lit his work and consumed his life. I once entertained a young German refugee who proved to be Lawrence's nephew by marriage. This man, when a boy of fourteen, had lived for some months in the Lawrence menage in Mexico. "He was wonderful. He could do everything; cook, build a house, repair a car. And his scholarship and interests were inexhaustible. I never knew such energy. He was like a volcano." Such was the impact he made upon the mind of a youth. The testimony of sophisticated critics confirmed that impression, in spite of the barrier which Lawrence, in his later writings and conduct, raised around himself. The best of that testimony is found in Aldous Huxley's Introduction to the volume of Lawrence's letters (and this in spite of the fact that Huxley is ignorant of the emotional and material problems of the poor).

Still better testimony is to be found in Lawrence's autobiographical novel *Sons and Lovers*, which made him famous. That book shows him and his mother before he had begun to spin a web of mysticism around the two figures. That mysticism is not easily described. It was diseased because it was over-emphatic and self-conscious. He saw woman as the consumer, a gigantic force of inertia slowing down the effort of the male to reach to the stars. Woman, like the female spider, consumes her mate when he has served her dark necessity. Such was the foundation of his philosophical fantasy, somewhat Nietzschean perhaps, more in the pathology of Weininger. On this base, he reared a theory of action by which the male should reassert himself, smash our present emasculated society of feminine softness



Self Portrait

## D. H. LAWRENCE

and inhibitions, and return to a Homeric state in which love, desire, intellectual effort, and artistic creation should be one harmonious and free manifestation. It was a fine purpose, and a noble revolt against the sordid circumstances of the puritanism into which he had been born. But the gulf between his origins and his aims was too great, and the effort to cross it brought him to an early death in 1930. In spite of this obsession, he was a vivid artist, inspired by a sense of close contact with *things*, the very substance of life, which he recreated through a prose style that never fully stood the strain.

NOVELS: *The White Peacock* (1911); *Sons and Lovers* (1913); *The Rainbow* (1915); *The Lost Girl* (1920); *Women in Love* (1920); *The Plumed Serpent* (1926); *The Woman Who Rode Away* (1928); *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); *The Man Who Died* (1931). POEMS: *Selected Poems* (1928); *Stories, Essays and Poems, Dent (Everyman)*.

## KATHERINE MANSFIELD

1888-1923

KATHERINE MANSFIELD is the pen-name of Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, whose family emigrated from London to New Zealand in 1841. One of her ancestors, a goldsmith, was mentioned by Pepys in 1660. Katherine was born in 1886. Her father, successful in business, was able to send her to London to be educated. There she met her father's cousin, the Countess Russell, famous author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*.

Katherine Mansfield began to write while still a student in London. She also practised music (the violoncello). At eighteen she returned home, but her literary ambition drove her back to London two years later. She had no success there, until A. R. Orage, the editor of *The New Age*, an influential weekly review, accepted her stories and printed them regularly during 1909-11. These she collected under the title of *In a German Pension*. The book was well received, and the author met other writers and critics. Amongst the critics was John Middleton Murry, whom she afterwards married.

After her first meeting with Mr. Murry, her work was printed almost exclusively by him, in various small literary journals, and finally in the national weekly, *The Athenæum*, all under his editorship.

## KATHERINE MANSFIELD



During his control of *The Athenæum*, Katherine reviewed novels there, and her critical work added much to her reputation. While thus engaged, she also published *Bliss* and *The Garden Party*, two collections of short stories.

By that time, however, she was already ill with tuberculosis, and the rest of her life was a martyrdom through which her gentle and eager spirit gradually emerged triumphant. She died at Fontainebleau, near Paris, in January, 1923. After her death her husband edited her *Journals, Letters, and Poems*, and collaborated with Ruth Mantz in writing a biography of her.

## KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Katherine Mansfield's work is distinguished by an acute physical sensibility. She was highly conscious of her purpose as a writer, and took infinite pains to collect impressions direct from life, recording them in notebooks for future use. Her stories are frequently compared with those of the Russian master Tchehov. They certainly have, in common with Tchehov's, that heightened sense of touch, that over-keen visual quality, so often characteristic of genius set in a consumptive body. Katherine Mansfield might similarly be compared with the poet John Keats. Like him, her imagination was so heightened, perhaps by disease, that when looking out of the window at some sparrows, she "would hop with them on the gravel path".

It is truer, however, to insist upon her originality. Her *Journals* show how she developed it, by a constant, almost cruel self-discipline of watchfulness and detachment. "All else fails but truth," she said. "I, at any rate, give the remainder of my life to it and it alone."

The result was work of an exquisite selectiveness, in incident, image, and phrase. She poured her vivid and alert personality into her stories. The effect was like that of water from a spring-head, caught in a glass, and making its sides misty with a delicious coldness. Her stories are undoubtedly the most beautiful of any written in English during her generation.

SHORT STORIES: In a German Pension (1911), *Constable*; Bliss (1920), *Constable*; The Garden Party (1922); The Dove's Nest (1923), *Constable*; Something Childish (1924). POEMS: Poems (1930), *Constable*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: The Journal of Katherine Mansfield (1927); The Letters of Katherine Mansfield (1928).

## T. S. ELIOT

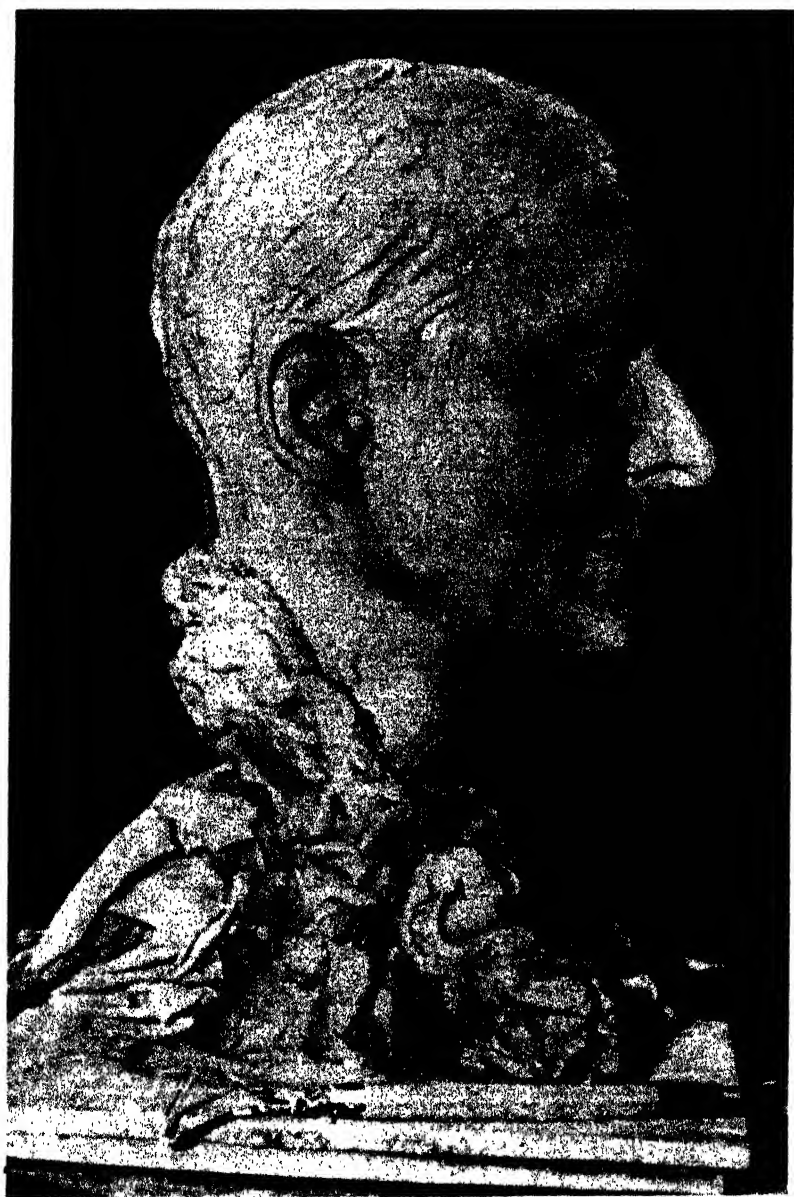
b. 1888

FULLY to appreciate the background from which the complex personality of Thomas Stearns Eliot has evolved, I would recommend two books, *The Last Puritan* by George Santayana, and *New England: Indian Summer*, by Van Wyck Brooks. The first is a study of the conflict between the spirit of beauty and that grim, isolated form of puritanism peculiar to New England. The second is a history of the decline and fall of the culture which sprang from that puritanism.

What Van Wyck Brooks has had to say about the intense personal struggle of Henry James to break away from the unique sectional civilization of nineteenth-century New England may be applied to T. S. Eliot. It serves to explain the intellectual aristocratic attitude (one might even say, more cruelly, the *snobbism*) which both writers assumed in order to cover up the pains of transplantation. Both chose to become English subjects, and to live in exclusive English circles. In effect, they moved from the most American exclusiveness to the most English, and remained indifferent to, and ignorant of, the warm, crude life of the masses.

Born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, Mr. Eliot was educated at Harvard, the Sorbonne, and Merton College, Oxford. His scholarship is intense, selective within the ascetic requirements of a nature that is on principle astringent. He has become a dominant influence as a critic amongst the poets writing during the last twenty years in England, and that influence has been towards an almost sterilizing self-criticism, a repression due to a chilling of the spirit by doubts and disciplines. The buds of inspiration are nipped below a certain temperature, and it is due to Mr. Eliot's processes of literary refrigeration that his own work, and that of his followers, has been sparse. Their garden is a rock-garden, whose few flowers are frequently miniature and drab of petal. But such blooms are the literary horticulturists' joy and pride.

Such negative virtues, however, would not alone have made Mr. Eliot a great influence amongst other writers. Still less would they have carried him out to the wider public which has of recent years learned to enjoy his work, and to recognize him as the spokesman of what is likely to be a profound religious revival amongst thinking people. It may be that a regeneration of the Episcopalian Church is now in process, and is likely to affect the reconstruction of the post-war society of man. Mr. Eliot is the voice of that regeneration. He must, therefore, possess a larger dynamic than his principle as a critic would allow him to admit. I suspect that he is more concerned with himself as a scholar than as an inspired singer. He has publicly repudiated the word "inspiration". I believe time will revenge itself upon him for this lack of simple faith, this final mysticism by which the poet works. Lines which he has written without theory are likely to survive as his memorial, the final distillate of a personality which is, in spite of its case-hardening of culture, profoundly sensitive, alert to simple emotions of joy and sorrow, and as sensuous as an artist needs to be. The very titles of his poems, in consecutive



Sculpture by Donald P. Hastings

degrees of desiccation, suggest how he would disagree with this estimate: *The Waste Land*, *Ash Wednesday*, *East Coker*, *Burnt Norton*, *Dry Salvages*: the names become more and more lava-like. But where there is lava, there is a volcano within. It is that inward fire by which Mr. Eliot's work will live. Meanwhile, he prefers to present to the world a more cultivated self, from behind which he allows his inward joy and humour merely to peer suspiciously.

“The tiger in the tiger-pit  
 Is not more irritable than I.  
 The whipping tail is not more still  
 Than when I smell the enemy  
 Writhing in the essential blood  
 Or dangling from the friendly tree.  
 When I lay bare the tooth of wit  
 The hissing over the arched tongue  
 Is more affectionate than hate,  
 More bitter than the love of youth  
 And inaccessible by the young.  
 Reflected from my golden eye  
 The dullard knows that he is mad.  
 Tell me if I am not glad!”

POEMS: *The Waste Land* (1922), *Faber*; *Ash Wednesday* (1930), *Faber*; *East Coker* (1940), *Faber*; *Burnt Norton* (1941), *Faber*; *Dry Salvages* (1941), *Faber*; *Poems, 1909–25* (1925), *Faber*; *Later Poems, 1925–35* (1941), *Faber*. PLAYS: *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *Faber*; *Family Reunion* (1939), *Faber*. ESSAYS: *Homage to John Dryden* (1924), *Faber*; *Selected Essays, 1917–32* (1932), *Faber*; *Elizabethan Essays* (1934), *Faber*.



## PHILIP GUEDALLA

1889-1944

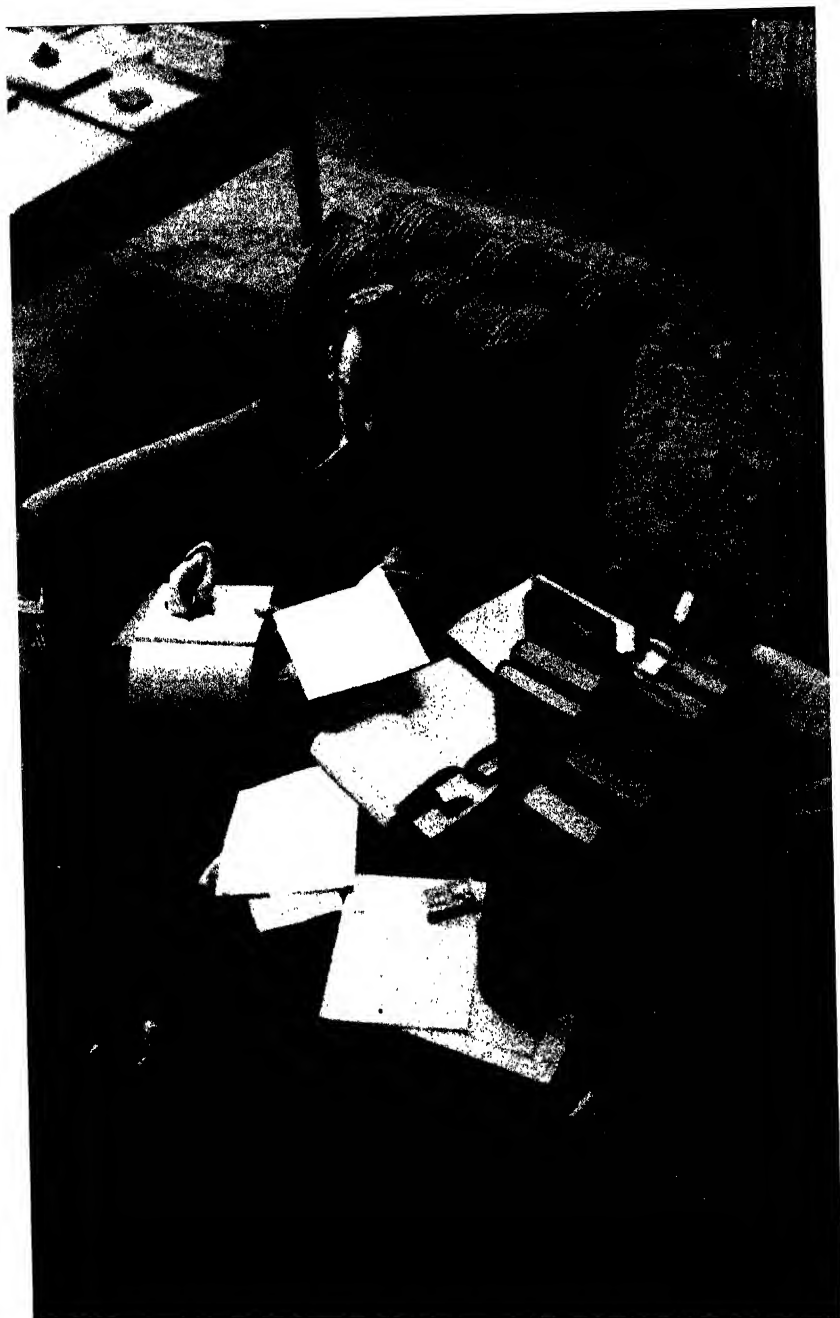
LIKE Lytton Strachey, almost his contemporary, Philip Guedalla was a literary historian and biographer who specialized in the nineteenth century. One feels that Strachey mistimed his period, and would have been more sympathetic and at home in the drier atmosphere of the eighteenth century. Guedalla, however, was most happy in the century of his choice. His taste, so far as we can judge from his prose style and the atmosphere in which his work is saturated, is consonant with that which ruled Britain in the day of the chiffonier, the antimacassar, and the rotund sofa. His sense of humour is Victorian. That is to say, it is florid, robust, given to the pun and the rhetorical metaphor. He exudes warmth, colour, and sentiment. It is not extravagant to liken his work, in its texture and atmosphere, to the paintings of Mark Gertler and Matthew Smith. The fruity colours of all three shine beneath a richly lubricated surface.

It is inevitable, in discussing Guedalla, to speak first of his technique, because it is the first thing which strikes upon the reader's attention. From his opening sentence to his last, this writer makes a conscious assault with wit, opulent image, dazzling juxtaposition of incidents and facts. He is seldom content to offer a plain narrative, and to let his subject speak for itself. He must be in front of it as *compère*, pointing out significant traits, likenesses, absurdities; and reminding the reader of what has gone before, and what is happening elsewhere in the incongruous panorama of history. So fluent, so apt and witty, is this running commentary, that the reader is sometimes apt to flag for very richness, just as through a meal accompanied by vintage wines, he craves suddenly for a draught of cold water.

This suggests that Guedalla's faults are due to the excess of his virtues. That is what, in summing up, one is inclined to think about him. His anxiety to give the utmost, to present it with a maximum of explanation and humorous connecting asides, tends to overlay the structure of his work, and to make it suspect because of the exuberance with which it is draped in ornament.

And that would be unfair to the sound historical scholarship, and the conscientious marshalling of it, upon which Guedalla's historical studies and biographies are founded.

Born in 1889, he was educated at Rugby and Balliol College, Oxford. He practised law for ten years, and was legal adviser to



*Howard Coster*

PHILIP GUEDALLA

certain Government Departments. He stood for Parliament as a Liberal. His experience, therefore, was eminently Victorian, and comprised the best and most progressive elements of that period. He made the most of it. When he first gave it a literary expression, his natural bravura, augmented possibly by the tradition of Balliol, was extravagant to a degree. He loaded every rift of his writing with jewels. But as time passed, this youthful undergraduate weakness was subdued. In his later work, he was more eager to make his subject shine than to shine himself. But eagerness remains; and it is not the least of his valuable qualities. What first animated his wit, later animated his judgment. He is a historian of the passing scene as well as of period themes, and proximity does not cloud his sense of values. One sees how firm is the moral foundation on which he stands, and how intimate his gift of sympathy. Amongst the profusion of his work, I think his books on Palmerston and the Duke of Wellington may finally be accepted as the most mature expression of a highly gifted writer.

BIOGRAPHY: Palmerston (1926), *Hodder*; The Duke (1931), *Hodder*; The Hundred Days (1934), *Hodder*; The Hundred Years (1936), *Hodder*; Churchill (1941), *Hodder*. ESSAYS: Men of Affairs (1927), *Hodder*; Men of Letters (1927), *Hodder*; Men of War (1927), *Hodder*.

HOWARD SPRING

b. 1889

THE fact that Howard Spring's two most ambitious novels, *O, Absolom!* and *Fame is the Spur*, have been translated into many languages, and notably into Spanish and Portuguese, asserts that this writer's work has delighted readers throughout the world. What quality do they possess, these two tales of gallant struggle against the vast indifference of society and circumstance, that they should awaken universal appreciation?

The events of this author's life partly answer that question. He has revealed those events in one book, *Heaven Lies About Us*, a short study of his childhood and youth. It is the tale of a child born in a little back street in the port of Cardiff. He was one of nine. His

father was a jobbing gardener, frequently out of work, a man of simple, pious character who had not learned the trick of making his way in a competitive world. He died early, leaving his widow to bring up her family as well as she could. The elder children had to help in this impossible task. The mother took in washing. Howard Spring, still a child at school, got a Saturday job as errand boy in a greengrocer's shop, where he worked for sixteen hours, his pay being one shilling and two herrings (the greengrocer also sold fish). He was sacked because he absented himself one



day in order to sit for a scholarship, which he failed to win. He bought himself a second-hand Bible, and frequented the meetings of the Plymouth Brethren. At the age of twelve he left school and sold newspapers, thus beginning his association with the world of literature. This long association was interrupted for a time while he served as office boy in an accountant's office. His employer, noticing the urchin's poor appearance, bought him a tie, roughly telling him to wear it. The child, wounded in his soul, "wore the tie for a week, and out of my first wages bought a new one. I hope my employer noticed it. I put his in the fire."

The story continues to the time when, in youth, he got a job as reporter on the local newspaper, and bought, under his mother's

## HOWARD SPRING

supervision, his first overcoat, and was thus set on the way to the career as journalist, and later as author, which we may read about in later volumes of his autobiography. Here, meanwhile, is enough to show what was the material from which this man built his character, and laid the foundation in memory and compassion of those novels which have found readers all over the world. The way he tells the story of his early struggle is what matters. We see a man who bears no grudge against society. He has accepted life as he has found it, with all its cruelty, indifference, unfairness, sudden bursts of luck and generosity. And he has enjoyed it. His little book is really a record of delights, superb discoveries in friendship and art, proud awakenings to the potentialities in himself. Over it all hovers the quality of gratitude; gratitude merely for being alive in a world teeming with the opportunity for adventure and achievement.

That is how Howard Spring approaches life. That is how he writes about it in his novels. Here is a man who has known it at its worst. He has looked up from the bottom, threatened by the weight of privilege, wealth, class distinction, and through that complicated layer of social denials he has seen the star of human nature shining with a divine light. His sense of compassion is intimate. It saturates his books, so that his people, his scenes and events, glow with a warmth that communicates to the reader a surety of contact, of understanding, and, above all, of open-minded fairness. He is a novelist who, having known and experienced all the hard things which life in the modern industrial competitive society can offer, remains serene, and bears no grudge to any man. He can create villains, but he does not judge them. Such a state of mind, followed with such urgent vitality, makes Howard Spring a novelist whose appeal is wide.

NOVELS: *O Absolom!* (1938), *Collins*; *Fame is the Spur* (1940), *Collins*.  
JUVENILE: *Sampson's Circus* (1936), *Faber*; *Tumbledown Dick* (1939), *Faber*.  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Heaven Lies About Us* (1939), *Constable*; *In the Meantime* (1936), *Faber*.

## DAVID GARNETT

b. 1892

DAVID GARNETT is something special in the contemporary British literary scene. Like Aldous Huxley, he began life hedged about with famous relations. His grandfather was the eminent Richard Garnett, head of the British Museum Library, as *his* father had been before him. Richard Garnett was also a poet, and amongst many other books he wrote a collection of tales, *The Twilight of the Gods*, which still survives. The elder son of this poet was Edward, who in his turn became an influential figure as a critic and publisher's reader. He had a genius for discovering new talent, and encouraging it. Hardly one of the better known writers of the period from 1890 to 1920 does not owe him a debt of gratitude. Conrad, Galsworthy, W. H. Hudson, W. H. Davies, Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, D. H. Lawrence are a few examples. In addition, he did much towards introducing Russian writers to English readers. His wife Constance was his medium in this matter, for she was the translator of Tolstoi, Turgeniev, Dostoevski, Tchekov. Edward Garnett spent his life trying to impose upon English novelists a sense of form in the art of fiction.

The infant David played amongst the feet of the eminent. This premature acquaintance with the world of writers made him turn, at first, to science. He trained as a botanist, and he still remains a great gardener, possessed of the "green thumb". His knowledge of nature is intimate and realistic. In appearance he looks like a healthy farmer who has just seen a great vision which has made him speechless. In conversation he has that charm which is possessed by all the Garnetts.

It was not long before the family tradition, and inherited gifts, overcame David Garnett's first bid for an independent career in another line of country. He began to write—but he wrote with a difference. His work had a simplicity that harked back over a century of romanticism and sought affinities with the prose style of Defoe. This vehicle suited his close, microscopic point of view. His first book was a text-book on the art of the kitchen-garden! Then came the biological fantasy, *Lady into Fox*, a tale whose plot savoured of Ovid, or a mediæval legend. A young wife is turned into a vixen, and her husband still cohabits with her, while waiting in terror for the rest of this cruel destiny to work itself out. The end is desperately tragic. Garnett has a queer gift for such agonies. In a way that is almost demure, so expert is his understatement, he can rend the heart



Ker Syeme

of the reader. A good example of this is the scene in *The Sailor's Return*, where a little half-caste child is stoned by the children of the village where the sailor has retired with his coloured wife. But Garnett has an even more intense imagination for bizarre incident and detail; as in *Go She Must*, where an old vicar goes mad and turns his house into a bird sanctuary, wrenching out the windows to give access to his darlings. And in that little masterpiece, *The Grasshoppers Come*, there is a scene in the desert where the airman, beside his fallen machine, is horrified by a plague of locusts which settles round him. He starts up his engine, so that the propeller shall kill at

DAVID GARNETT

least a few million of the assailants. As Garnett describes it, the scene is amazing. One hears the papery rustle of the falling insects; one sees the scarred hands of the airman; one aches with his thirst. Garnett combines a passion for flying with one for fishing. It is a characteristic blend of opposites. It might serve as a symbol for the combination of his quiet, deliberately simplified prose style, with the strangeness, wildness, sometimes inhuman cruelty of his subject matter. His outlook seems to be that of a creature of the wilds, or of a visitor from Mars, rather than that of a domestic human. A cold poetry, a keen science, are his materials; and he uses them by means of a monotonous prose whose whole art is the avoidance of art. There is nothing quite like his work in English letters. No writer could have been more suitably chosen to edit the letters of Lawrence of Arabia (as his father before him had edited Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*).

NOVELS: *Lady into Fox* (1922), *Chatto*; *The Sailor's Return* (1925), *Chatto*; *Go She Must* (1927); *The Grasshoppers Come* (1931), *Chatto*. PRESENT WAR: *The War in the Air* (1941), *Chatto*.

A. G. STREET

b. 1892

To the reader in other countries who wants to catch something of the very soil of England, I recommend the books of Arthur George Street. He is not principally a writer. He is a farmer, and the son of a farmer. He still works the land which his father worked, and literary success has not lured him away from it to chase the marsh-fire of fame. The English farmhouse, and the labourer's cottage, have added a solid quota to the army of our writers, and Mr. Street is an admirable example of their virtues. He is a native of Wessex, and of Wiltshire in particular. Wiltshire is a county of some extremes; the most luxurious valleys, and the most wide and bare downs. It is described in detail in W. H. Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life*.

The lovely world which that book portrays is the setting in which A. G. Street grew up. Born in 1892, fifteen years after his sister Fanny Street, who has done such brilliant work in the educational world, he spent the first eighteen years of his life on Ditchampton Farm, Wilton. He went to Canada and worked on farms there for





B.B.C.

three years. Then he returned to the home farm and has worked it ever since. So he knows his subject from the roots upwards.

He began writing in 1931 as a hobby, and his first book, *Farmer's Glory*, was an instant success. Its sincerity, first-hand knowledge, unforced love of animals and the land with all that grows thereon, its shrewd bucolic estimates of human character, and its sweet-smelling humour, came like a breath of spring into the book-world. All his subsequent books have been rich in these qualities. They exude them, and so does the personality which he has subsequently introduced to an even larger audience over the radio. His velvety west-country speech, his friendliness and open-air candour, have made

him as great a success as a broadcaster as he has been with his books.

Following the direct statement of circumstances in *Farmer's Glory*, he tried his hand on country novels. They have their originality too. *Strawberry Roan* has for heroine a heifer calf; but this does not make the book bovine. It is absorbingly interesting. In his autobiography, *Wessex Wins*, which I think is rather too naïvely chatty a book, Mr. Street quotes a passage from a review which I wrote of *Strawberry Roan*. I quote it again because it serves to explain his distinct flavour, and why that flavour has agreed with so many readers. Here is what I said about him then. "Mr. A. G. Street, with *Farmer's Glory*, his first book, walked into the literary world, not even bothering to wipe the soil of his own fields from his boots. He filled the critics' nostrils with the scent of hay and cattle-cake and cows' breath. He brought the whole village with him."

Here is an anecdote which shows his quality. It shows more than that. It shows his Englishness, that quiet faith which survives war and the direst of perils. It appears that in 1940 (England's darkest year) he discovered that his farm lacked a walnut tree. So he planted one. His neighbour chaffed him, saying that a walnut tree does not bear fruit for twenty-five years. "At that time, you won't have any teeth to eat them!" Our English farmer reflects upon this. "It may well prove true," he says. "Even so, I have planted my walnut-tree in the sure and certain faith that if I am spared to farm Ditchampton Farm when it first produces nuts I shall be living under a British flag and system of government that will permit me to offer those nuts to whomsoever I may please." That, I think, is a fair example of this English farmer's glory.

COUNTRY LIFE: *Farmer's Glory* (1932), *Faber*. NOVELS: *Strawberry Roan* (1932), *Faber*; *Country Days* (1933), *Faber*; *Endless Furrows* (1934), *Faber*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Wessex Wins*, *Faber*.

## REBECCA WEST

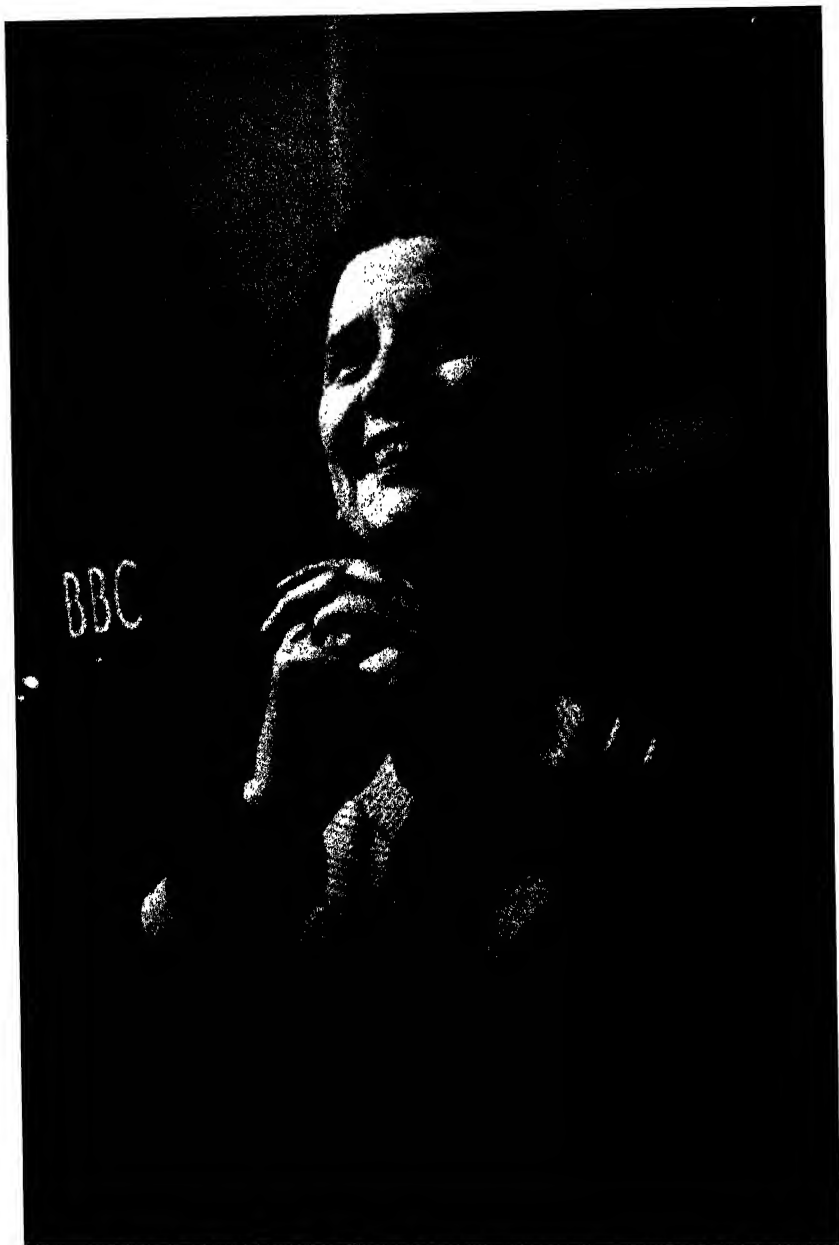
b. 1892

FOR more than twenty years the pattern of the literary scene in Britain has been marked, one might even say variegated, by a shining thread of double-stranded strength. Those two threads are wit and sagacity. The thread has made its way through the design in a desultory progress, disappearing at times when one might have expected its emphasis; emerging in the most unlikely moments and places.

This is a fanciful device for introducing the work and personality of Rebecca West to a reader from abroad, who is looking at contemporary British letters perhaps for the first time. But I believe it is a serviceable device, for it shows in what proportion, and with what æsthetic result, this writer's elusive personality has made itself felt since she first began to be noticed, not long after she joined the staff of a journal called *The Freewoman* in 1911. She was then nineteen years of age, young enough still to be at college.

From that time, in spite of the temptation to shine (a temptation which her exquisite wit must always have forced upon her), she served a solid apprenticeship as a journalist, and it was not until 1922 that she published her first novel, *The Judge*. It is to be noted, however, that before taking this step towards achievement in creative writing, she produced a study of Henry James, a master whose prose method, if not his syntax, has always influenced her. James, with his massive grand manner, his pursed up lips and his fastidious, wincing nerves, has a womanly counterpart in Rebecca West. It is that womanliness which makes her the more deadly, for her wit, both in conversation and in her writing, has a swift, spontaneous flash that strikes like the tongue of the adder. I am certain that this weapon, possessed by a mind and character so spacious, tolerant and even neighbourly, must be almost as much a terror to its owner as it is to the bores and humbugs against whom it flashes out. The history of its devastating exercise has become legendary, and I can imagine some future literary graduate producing a very readable thesis that will be hardly more than a catalogue of the *bons mots* uttered by Rebecca West, and a guide to the cemetery of reputations (false reputations) which lies around them.

But that is only one aspect of this gifted writer. She has a more sober aspect, or habit, the main army of that intellectual force which follows up the flying column of her wit. For some years she was contented to engage it principally in journalism and critical work.



B.B.C.

## REBECCA WEST

In the nineteen-twenties she was for some time reviewing novels in *The New Statesman*, and her method of doing it started a vogue, in that paper and other weekly journals, which has tended to become rather a facetious habit. In her original hands it was gay, sparkling, a riot of light and laughter. It was almost too good to be true, as we have since learned from her dreary imitators.

During that time she wrote infrequent novels, the last of which was *The Thinking Reed*, published in 1936. These stories are studies of human reactions in the world of affluence that permitted what might be called an aristocracy of the nerves and the senses. Rebecca West loved to linger, in scented paragraphs, upon the luxuries of life, physical as well as mental. It was as though she were trying to hide the cruel edge of her wit behind the richest stuffs she could find. It marked a period of uncertainty and lack of direction.

The war has changed that; the war and an experience that took her some five years ago to Yugoslavia on a lecture tour. The tour lasted a few weeks; but the lecturer remained to study the country whose life, and particularly its religious life (which was synonymous with its superb art), had captured her imagination and revealed herself to herself. She now knew what to do with her remarkable gifts. She wrote the huge work, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, whose worth I, for one, have not yet assimilated. No nation has ever had a greater tribute paid it. No writer, in offering such a tribute (consisting of five years' solid work), has surely ever made so full a discovery of self. The writer who set out on this book was a smaller and less coherent one than she who wrote its final words.

NOVELS: *The Return of the Soldier* (1918); *The Judge* (1922), *Hutchinson*; *The Thinking Reed* (1936), *Hutchinson*; *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), *Macmillan*.

## ALDOUS HUXLEY

b. 1894

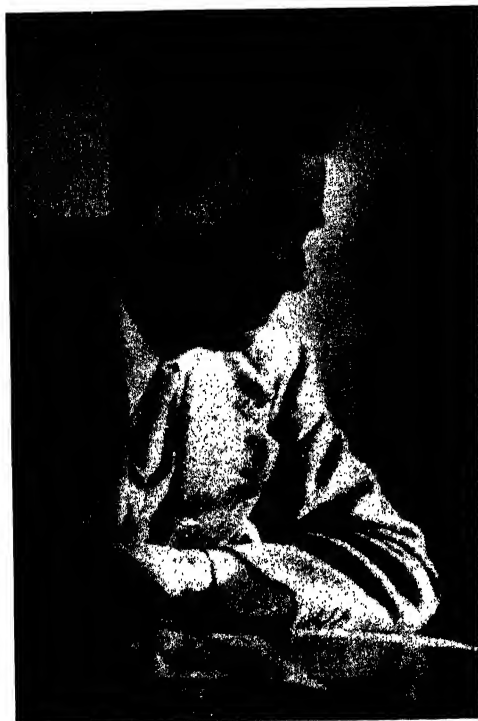
No British writer, in any period, has had such a formidable literary ancestry as Aldous Huxley. It may be said that he is a congenital intellectual. He is the grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley. On his mother's side he is related to the poet, Matthew Arnold, and the novelist, Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Thus three pillars of Victorian England have shadowed his life. They have fenced him in. Maybe his effort to peer over that enclosure at the common world outside has given him his reputation for aloofness and a certain air of mental aristocracy which many critics have found repellant.

Not only that, but he has an elder brother (elder by some seven years), Professor Julian Huxley, who, besides being the most popular scientist of our day, is also a writer and a poet of grace and lucidity.

Aldous Huxley, therefore, has had good enough excuse to suffer from an inferiority complex. If he has suffered thus, he has managed to sublimate the weakness. His rebellion, that might have taken the form of an aversion from the mental life, has gone quite the other way. He has chosen (not consciously, probably) to compete with his family on its own ground. He has taken their scientific outlook and method, and has applied it to art and philosophy, making for himself a keen-edged scalpel with which to dissect the body of present-day society.

Thus there is something clinical, lethal, about all his work. Before he can permit himself to touch life, he has to anæsthetize it, and his imagination makes its contact with reality only through a gauze soaked in disinfectant.

The result is a number of brilliant books (novels, poems, essays), whose native inclination has been exquisitely suited to the period, the environment, which it has been their purpose to portray and to criticize. Born in 1894, Huxley emerged from the university just after the last war. Partial blindness due to an accident had prevented him from serving in that war. With J. M. Murry and Katherine Mansfield, he worked on *The Athenæum* in 1920-21. After publishing some verse and a book of short stories (*Limbo*), he produced a novel, *Crome Yellow*, somewhat in the manner of T. L. Peacock, but marked by his own pronounced character. That character has remained consistently puritan in outlook. He is revolted by the flesh and its workings; its lethargies, appetites, stupidities, and the



obscurations caused by the mist rising from the warm blood of humanity. He looked at the post-war world of the 1920's, with its weariness and cynical disillusionment (a mood which Noel Coward expressed in the theatre), and from this limited viewpoint and exclusive social experience, he found sufficient evidence and justification for his personal point of view. One corrosive novel followed another, of which the most influential and best selling were *Antic Hay*, *Those Barren Leaves*, *Point Counter Point*, *Brave New World* and *Eyeless in Gaza*. The last, published in 1936, might have been

written by a twentieth-century reincarnation of Savonarola and El Greco, for the book is inspired by the fierce disgust of the monk and the oblique vision of the painter.

There is, however, another aspect of Aldous Huxley which, removed from the irritation of his contact with the mundane world, shows a serene happiness and equability of judgment. As a critic of literature, political principles, and philosophy, his detachment and exaltation of mind become a stabilizer instead of a purgatory. *Jesting Pilate*, *Texts and Pretexts*, *The Olive Tree* are delightful volumes of criticism which, alongside his books of poetry (notably *Leda* and *The Cicadas*), make the reader wish that Huxley had sought this way out of his disgust with human folly, rather than the way of oriental religious self-liquidation, which he has preferred.

NOVELS: *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Chatto*; *Antic Hay* (1923), *Chatto*; *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), *Chatto*; *Point, Counter Point* (1928), *Chatto*; *Brave New World* (1932), *Chatto*; *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), *Chatto*. POEMS: *Selected Poems* (1925), *Blackwell*. ESSAYS: *Jesting Pilate* (1926), *Chatto*; *The Olive Tree* (1936), *Chatto*; *Ends and Means* (1937), *Chatto*. BIOGRAPHY: *Gray Eminence* (1942), *Chatto*.

## J. B. PRIESTLEY

b. 1894

WRITERS tend to live and to think too much within the confines of their own profession. After the first struggle in youth, and the attainment of some recognition, they prefer to nurture their growing self-confidence by moving about amongst the few people who have heard of them. It is a weakness common to folk in all walks of life, and writers must not be unduly censured for it. But the habit cuts them off from the larger, and alas, indifferent world which knows and cares nothing for their achievement. "What *are* Keats?" said the old lady, on overhearing a discussion about our immortal, ever-young poet, John Keats. It is a chilling phrase for the ambitious author. It makes him realize how rare and miraculous it is for a writer to break through the literary world, and to command the attention of the man in the street. Dickens did it. Kipling did it. Not many more, during the past century.

John Boynton Priestley is one of those few. His name is a household word. As novelist, dramatist, and broadcaster, he has captured the attention of the great British public. And he keeps it. They like him. He is rude to them. He airs his professional grievances before them, he curses the politicians they have chosen as their representatives, he tells them they are fools to put up with the sort of lives that our social muddle forces them to live. He tells them that he knows better, and that they should listen to him. In spite of that, they like him and even admire him. Why is that?

The first reason is that Priestley is sound; as sound as a clean, ripe apple. The man and his work are patent to the eye and to the instinct. One knows at once that here is something good, healthy, normal, and above all, charitable. Priestley has the ability to love his neighbour. He does it in a detached, guarded way, for he is a Yorkshireman. First acquaintance with him through his work is a matter of gruff and even suspicious contacts. But very soon one feels in his novels, his essays, and his plays (even more during his broadcasts) a certain sureness of heart, an understanding of the thousand and one everyday troubles and delights which are the common lot of British men and women. He carries a sense of encouragement and vitality. It is a valuable force, which, added to his literary gift, makes him a power in the land.

What of that literary gift? It is not so ordinary as some superior critics have assumed it to be. As a verbal craftsman he is admirable,

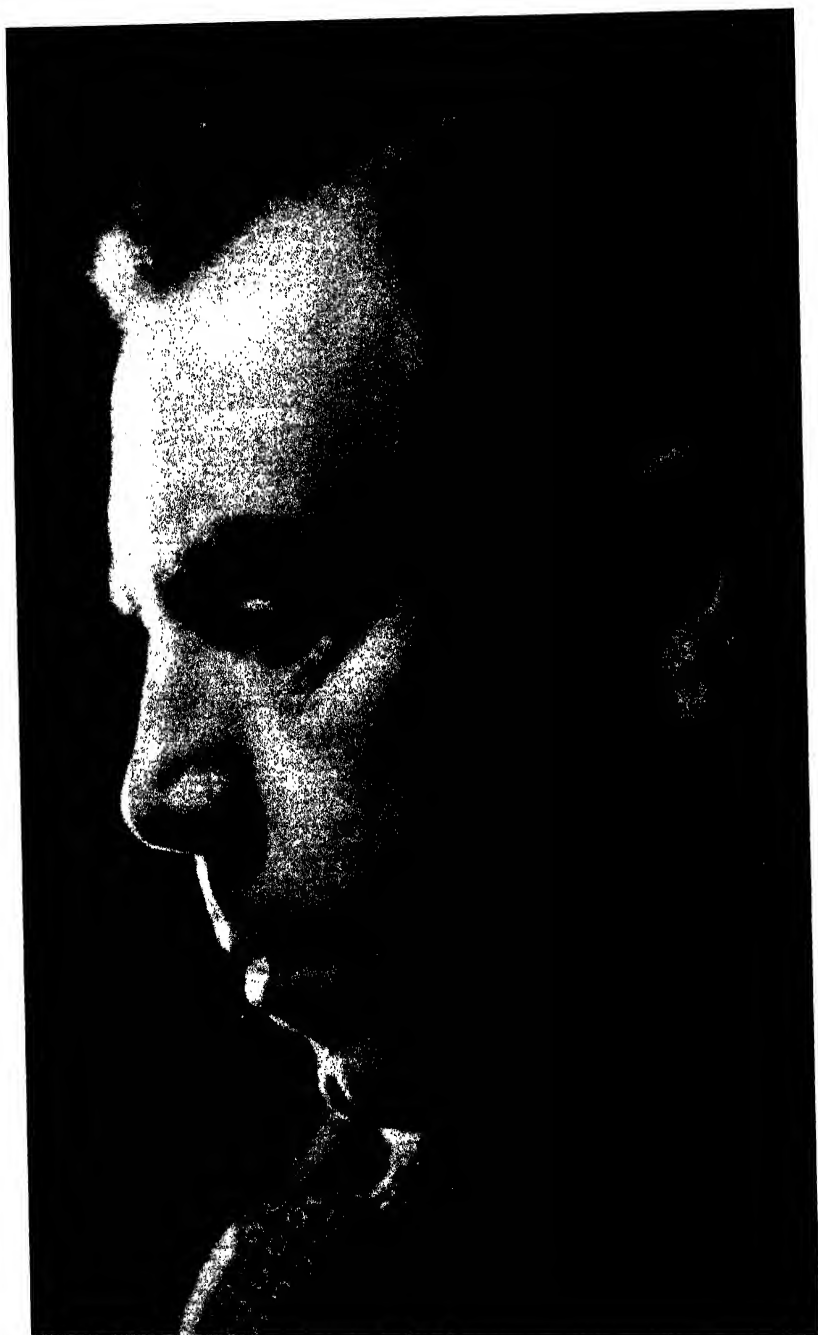


for he loves his medium of words and uses them with imagination. He began as an essayist, and throughout his work he colours his phrases with the essayist's nice touch; a selective touch. This delicacy has frequently been overlooked by people impressed with the large vigour which has forced him to write. Priestley has skill and tenderness, a sensitiveness and a sense of solitude and privacy. These are the poet's attributes, which give his work depth and fragrance. You will find them impregnating all his work, and you will have to take them for granted, because he has a larger purpose with you, his reader. He has set out to prove something to you, or to convict you of being stupid, lazy, muddled. He is going to set you right, or to show you how some hitherto insoluble problem in ethics or metaphysics does not really exist at all. He'll brush aside your reference to his æsthetic gifts. Nevertheless, they are considerable.

Born in 1894, he remained within the enclosure of the literary world until 1929, when his long novel, *The Good Companions*, won a tremendous popularity, which it has retained. It is a story of ordinary people, good souls putting up a brave fight in the battle of life. Priestley has indulged his love of the street, the railway station and all public places. He has indulged also his still potential love of the theatre, for the centre of interest in this picaresque tale is a concert party.

That love did not long remain potential. The best that Priestley has done, the deepest and most courageous explorations both into the mind and heart of man, he has done in the theatre. He is still comparatively young, and has survived success. That last is something which only sterling character and a fine humility can do. What will be his next conquest?

NOVELS: *The Good Companions* (1929); *Angel Pavement* (1930), *Dent (Everyman)*. PLAYS: *Time and the Conways* (1937); *I Have Been Here Before* (1937), *Heinemann*; *Johnson Over Jordan* (1939). CRITICISM: *The English Novel* (1927); *English Humour* (1929). AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Midnight on the Desert* (1937), *Heinemann*; *Rain upon Godshill* (1939), *Heinemann*; *Out of the People* (1942), *Heinemann & Collins*.



## CHARLES MORGAN

b. 1894

FOR some years Charles Morgan has been one of the most popular of British authors amongst French readers. Indeed, since his novel, *Portrait in a Mirror*, was awarded the Femina-Vie Heureuse Prize in 1930, the temptation has been for our native critics to regard Mr. Morgan's work as an imported article from across the Channel.

He is, however, distinctly British, was trained for our Navy and served in it during the 1914 war. After that experience, he went at the age of twenty-five to Oxford where he became President of the Dramatic Society. After taking his degree he joined the staff of *The Times* newspaper, as assistant to the famous dramatic critic, A. B. Walkley, whom he succeeded in 1926. His critiques in that paper are always recognizable for their polished style.

Following *Portrait in a Mirror*, he found a wider public in this country, and a still wider one in America, with *The Fountain*, which won him the Hawthornden Prize for 1933. In this romantic tale, cunningly mixed ingredients of theatrically presented events and morbid psychological drama are issued through a prose medium reminiscent sometimes of Walter Pater, sometimes of the later George Moore, and in the moments of emotional crisis, of the Authorized Version of the Bible. Mr. Morgan's triumph is in having unified these influences so subtly that only a careful critic can trace them. The general public has acclaimed him as a master of exquisite, sculptured prose.

He followed this spectacular success with a Byronic novel called *Sparkenbroke* (1936), in which the hero is rich, handsome, aristocratic, and a poetic genius. There is one unforgettable scene where he works frenziedly through the night, urged by his love-sorrows and his jealous muse. The sheets of paper are filled one by one and flung to the floor. Next morning the storm is swept up, and carefully sorted out by his hero-worshipping valet. In this tale, as in *The Fountain*, the problems of love, and especially of sexual love, play an involved part, tintured as they are with a tireless analysis of egoism.

It was inevitable that Mr. Morgan, having become so fashionable as a novelist, should turn to the world of the theatre, with which he was already so professionally intimate. His play, *The Flashing Stream*, a drama made from his knowledge of life in the Royal Navy, was immediately successful both here and in America.



Portrait Head of Charles Morgan by Gordon Alchin

CHARLES MORGAN

NOVELS: *Portrait in a Mirror* (1929), *Macmillan*; *The Fountain* (1932), *Macmillan*; *Sparkenbroke* (1936), *Macmillan*; *The Voyage* (1940), *Macmillan*. PLAY: *The Flashing Stream* (1938), *Macmillan*.

ROBERT GRAVES

b. 1895

DURING the war of 1914–18, public interest in Britain stirred from its customary quiescent attitude towards poetry and became active. With Rupert Brooke as pioneer, a number of “war” poets put out volumes of rhymed commentary upon their harsh experiences, and their efforts were warmly received. That fashion died down, but a few of the poets survived, to prove themselves independent of violent circumstance. They continued to develop as writers, and solidified their reputations. Outstanding amongst them was Robert Graves, a poet whom it is difficult to categorize. He belongs to no clique, no group. His work is so experimental and varied that it cannot be labelled as Georgian, or of the “political” school which flourished for a few years in the ’thirties. It stands by itself, the voice of a singular man struggling to express his own odd personality, angry and baffled by the effort, but never defeated.

If Graves has any associations, they might be traced to a quaint old poet of the sixteenth century, about whom Graves has written. This poet, John Skelton, was tutor to King Henry VIII, and, later, became a country priest with an independent mind. His poetry was archaic and rough, even for its time, for he harked back to old Saxon measures and stresses. Graves has experimented upon that æchæology, but with all his technical devices and ingenuities, he informs his poetry with an instant liveliness, curiosity, and that sympathy which arrives after a personal agony.

“His eyes are quickened so with grief,  
He can watch a grass or leaf  
Every instant grow; he can  
Clearly through a flint wall see,  
Or watch the startled spirit flee  
From the throat of a dead man.”

With this faculty, he has, in his prose work, been able to give an



Robert Graves (Hulton Press)

intense and dramatic life to history. In particular, he has a gift for terse narrative, especially of military matters. His knowledge of these last was gained during his service in France with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. After the 1914-18 war, he wrote a provocative autobiography, *Goodbye to all That*, which was a best-seller. Through this book the Irishman in Graves trails his coat openly. It is a habit to which the author is always inclined. His remarkable power for telling a complicated story in a simple way (one of the final tests of a capable writer) is best shown in two works. The first is *Lawrence and the Arabs*, a straight narrative account of the work done by his friend, Col. T. E. Lawrence, in the Middle East, work which probably shortened the duration of that war. The second is a two volume fiction, *I, Claudius*, and *Claudius the God*, in which the incredibly interwoven events throughout the Roman Empire, that ran parallel with the life of Christ, are presented by the author with a skill that commands admiration. This work won both the Hawthornden and the James Tait Black Prizes. He followed this with a novel about Belisarius, Justinian's famous general, which won the Stock Prize, 1939.

## ROBERT GRAVES

This combination of intellectual power and aggressive personality has equipped Robert Graves with a restless critical faculty, which he has not failed to exercise. He has written many studies of English poetry, and the functioning of the creative mind. Notable amongst them are *On English Poetry* (in the course of which he studies the authenticity of *vers libre*), and *The English Ballad*.

Born in 1895, he is still vigorously at work. It would be rash to conjecture in which direction he will next break out. Whatever way he takes, the reader may be sure that it will be self-chosen, wilful, and original.

NOVELS: *I, Claudius* (1934), *Methuen*; *Claudius the God* (1934), *Methuen*; *Count Belisarius* (1938); *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth* (1940), *Methuen*; *Wife to Mr. Milton* (1942), *Cassell*. BIOGRAPHY: *Lawrence and the Arabs* (1927), *Cape*. POEMS: *Collected Poems* (1938), *Cassell*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *Goodbye to All That* (1929), *Cape*.

## LANCÉLOT HOGBEN

b. 1895

I HAVE a dramatic recollection of a small event which took place a quarter of a century ago. Working with me in a dingy laboratory was a young Irishman, dour, intent, ambitious. He wanted to be a doctor, and in his spare time he was studying towards the fulfilment of this difficult ambition; difficult, because he was poor. He attached himself as an external student at London University. After he had been there about a month, attending evening lectures, I noticed an intensification of his ardour. He was a man possessed. One day he burst out of his usual taciturnity. "My boy," he said, in his rich brogue, "there's a lecturer at Birkbeck College who will bring the soul out of you! Man! he's a genius! He's younger than we are; but his knowledge, his power of mind; his vitality! It's music to listen to him. He's made zoology a new thing to me!" I listened with interest, and caught the enthusiasm. "What's his name?" I said to this youth who has since become a famous orthopædic surgeon. "Ugh!" he replied in disgust, "What's his name at all! He's bigger than his name. Nobody knows him. But I tell you, they will know him. The world will know him! His name is Lancelot Hogben."

That little scene has remained one of the most intense moments of my youth. What an example it is of the recognition of quality by

quality. "The world will know him." That prophecy by the ambitious student has come true. Lancelot Hogben is now one of the most famous of British scientists. Still in early middle age, he has to his credit a body of research that has won him a high place in the scientific world. In addition to this, his gift for lucid exposition has made him as widely known a popularizer of scientific inquiry as was Thomas Henry Huxley, and our own Dr. Julian Huxley to-day. Unlike the Huxleys, he is a self-made man. He



went from a county school to Cambridge, where he quickly specialized. At the age of twenty-four he was Lecturer in Zoology at the Imperial College of Science, London. (It was during this period, when he gave evening lectures outside Imperial College, that the embryonic surgeon came under his influence and inspiration.) He went rapidly from one academic position to another, spending two years as Assistant Professor at McGill, returning as Professor of Social Biology at London University. He is now the Regius Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University. His academic record might be more fully detailed, but that is not the most interesting part of his career, in spite of the vast influence his keen, incisive personality has had upon several generations of students in Britain, Canada, and South Africa.

Attracted to specialist work perhaps by his wife, Dr. Enid Charles, the well-known authority on population statistics, he has concentrated his attention upon the comparatively new branch of biological science known as endocrinology, the study of the ductless glands. This study, with its instant bearing upon the mechanics of genetics, has resulted in various publications embodying the results of his researches. In recognition of his work he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1936.

Alongside these activities, he has written two large books of a more popular kind. The first, *Mathematics for the Million*, published in



## LANCELOT HOGBEN

1936, continues to have sales that might make a novelist envious. The book is symptomatic of the whole trend of public interest in a generation that is weary of vagueness, of political generalizations, and craves for facts and precision. Responding to the ardour with which his book was received, Professor Hogben wrote *Science for the Citizen*, and found his vast audience still hungry. In all, no small achievement which he began a quarter of a century ago when unwittingly he put a young student on the road to becoming a famous surgeon.

Mathematics for the Million (1936), *Unwin*; Science for the Citizen (1938), *Unwin*.

## ERIC LINKLATER

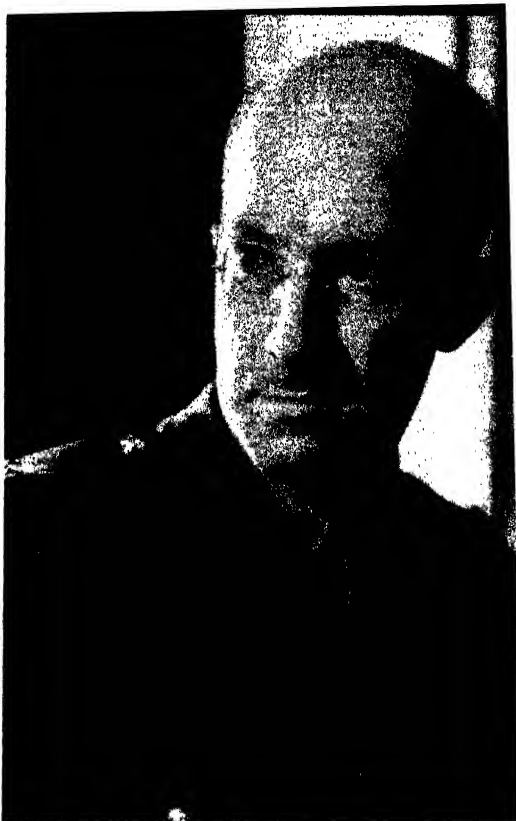
b. 1899

I THINK that the smaller an island on which an intelligent man is born, the more cosmopolitan he becomes in later life. We have two writers to-day who were born in the Orkney Islands: Edwin Muir, the austere poet and critic, and Eric Linklater, the writer, whom it is not so easy to define. Both are excellent Europeans. Each represents an aspect of the Scottish character; Muir its quiet, patient, subjective side, with still waters running deep; Linklater its cousinship to the Gallic spirit, with a delight in rhetoric and Rabelaisian humour. Both, being Scots, are metaphysicians.

Eric Linklater was born in 1899. Both his father and grandfather were master mariners. He would have followed the same profession had he not been handicapped by bad eyesight. The same disability found him out when, as a boy of fifteen during the 1914-18 war, he enlisted in the 4th Gordons. Later, he enlisted again in the Black Watch, and was wounded at Passchendaele soon after his nineteenth birthday. After that he became a medical student at Aberdeen University, but showed his originality, and his gift for divagation, by taking his M.A. instead of his medical degree. This aberration secured him a job on *The Times of India*, which he relinquished in order to wander about Asia Minor, coming to rest for a time in Vienna, and in Venice. After that, a Commonwealth Fellowship sent him to America for two years, during which time he wrote *Poets' Pub*, a promising extravaganza that already showed his love for a wandering, rollicking life and a precise, academic literature. He had

learned to wear pedantry with an air of nonchalance, and to display it with satiric gestures.

Then he fell seriously ill, owing, as he said "to my hazardous and assiduous researches into the matter of bootlegging". The phrase is characteristic. His humour works in that grandiose way. The book written during this illness, *Juan in America*, was a success, and supplied him with sufficient funds to set him off on his wanderings again, the wanderings of a hilarious scholar. He is still on the road, though recently he has been in a soldier's uniform again, and his



luggage, both mental and material, scattered about the world, in odd places and corners, where he appears at unexpected moments to replenish a spirit seldom in need of such refilling. All his work offers a commentary on his wanderings, and brings the harvest of his travels home to his own mill, a metaphysical mill. Read *The Men of Ness*, *Magnus Merriman*, his autobiographical excursion called *The Man on my Back*, and his recent Socratic symposium, *The Cornerstones*, to see how close he grinds his corn, and what substantial food it offers to the reader whose mind and soul are hungry in a world of confusion, war, terrible loss, and astonishing discoveries. Here is a man who has explored the nature of the virtue of courage, and has found it to be joyful.

NOVELS: *Poets' Pub* (1930); *Juan in America* (1931), *Cape*; *The Men of Ness* (1932), *Cape*; *Magnus Merriman* (1934), *Cape*. PLAYS: *The Raft and Socrates Asks Why* (1942), *Macmillan*; *Cornerstones* (1941), *Macmillan*. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *The Man on my Back* (1941), *Macmillan*. PRESENT WAR: *The Defence of Calais* (1941), *H.M.S.O.*; *The Highland Division* (1942), *H.M.S.O.*

## JAMES HILTON

b. 1900

It is not often that the gentle writer, the advocate of quietness and sweetness of disposition, is quickly recognized. The tendency to-day is all for strong meat, especially in fiction. That swing-over of public



taste which began in America after W. D. Howells and Henry James had been deposed from their thrones, has spread through the novel-reading world, and probably includes even China and Tibet, the last civilizations to succumb to the cult of violence.

I mention Tibet because it brings me to the book which at once brought a gentle writer to fame, Mr. James Hilton, when with his

## JAMES HILTON

novel *Lost Horizon*, he won the Hawthornden Prize in 1933, at the age of thirty-three. Its theme is a picturesque piece of symbolism, or allegory, with the intention of contrasting our Western civilization of materialism with that of the Orient. He does so by removing his characters from the complexities of both spheres of influence. A party of representative British people is brought by means of an accident into contact with the inhabitants of a religious institution in the high mountains of Tibet, and there the drama of their various characters and their two traditions is enacted. It takes place in an air rarified by height and remoteness. Quiet reigns. In that quiet (the central motif for all Mr. Hilton's work) the accepted values of this sordid world, the quest for riches, high place, the comforts of the flesh, the indulgences of the mind, are thinned away in the dry air; an air almost of eternity.

It is a book of arresting quality. Its sincerity, its nostalgia after the heights of the human spirit, insinuate themselves into the reader's spirit. It is not surprising that this book has made an international reputation, and been filmed with great success.

And after that, Mr. Hilton made another success, with a book about a schoolmaster withdrawing into the mists of old age. *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, is on a lower emotional plane. Many readers find it abjectly sentimental. But here again, the story is told through the medium of a personality that has some quiet, compelling quality that draws people from the boisterous demands of more robust writers.

NOVELS: *Lost Horizon* (1933), *Macmillan*; *Knight Without Armour* (1933), *Macmillan*; *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1934), *Hodder*; *Random Harvest* (1941), *Macmillan*.

## GRAHAM GREENE

b. 1904

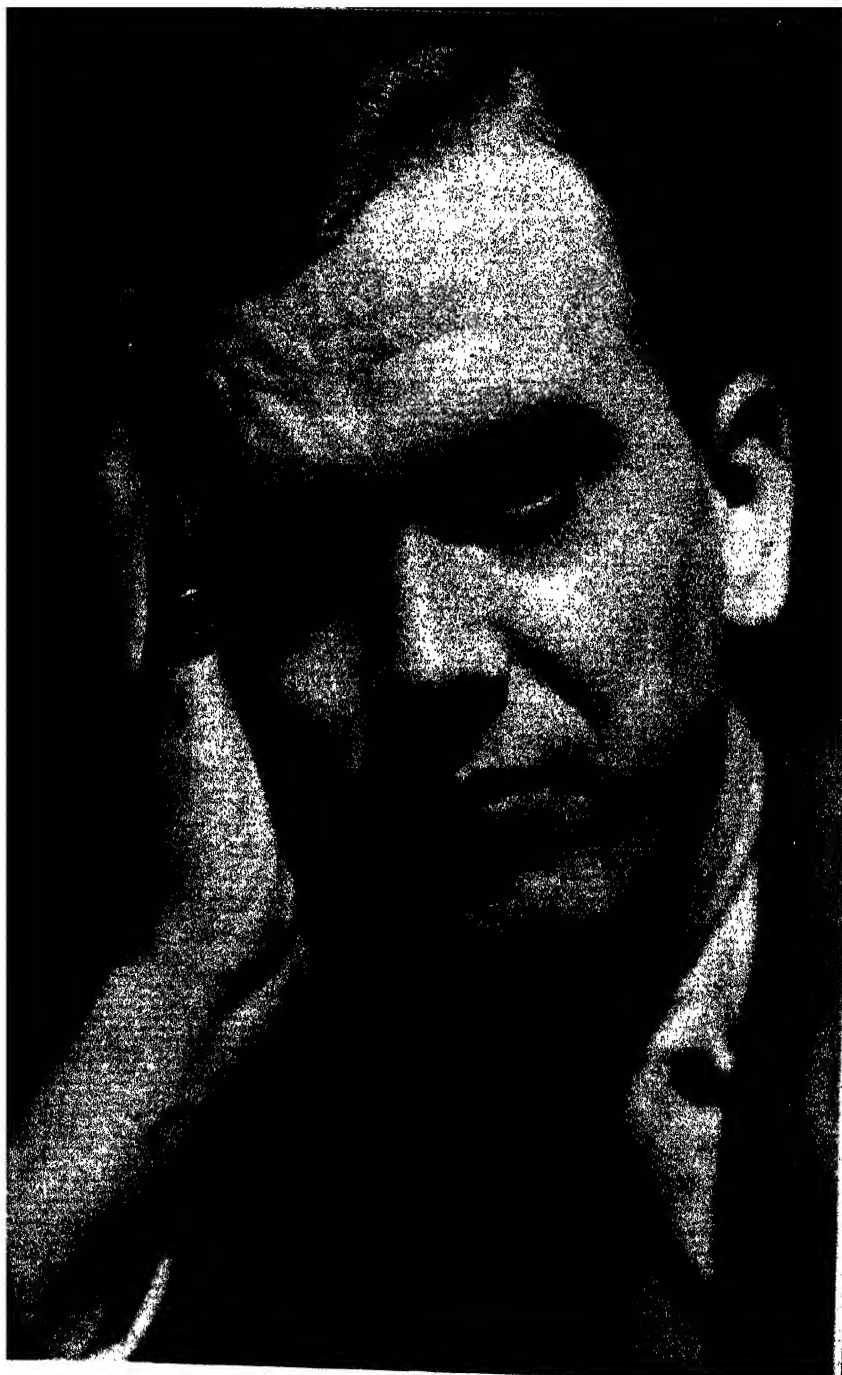
GRAHAM GREENE, outstanding amongst our younger novelists, is one of a distinguished professional family. His father was Headmaster of Berkhamstead School and his uncle Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty. His elder brother has done valuable research upon the medical aspects of mountaineering, and was Senior Medical Officer to the Mount Everest Expedition in 1933. His younger brother is a war correspondent of whom it is sufficient to say that he was expelled from Germany in 1939.

I have said that Graham Greene is outstanding. The reason for that is not so much his versatility, as the way in which he unifies his various and wide interests under a single outlook, and expresses them in a prose style that is almost startling in its starkness. The style is the man. A paragraph taken at random from any of his books is likely to reveal the implicit fervour of his religious faith, and to show by the choice of epithet and image how active and dynamic is that faith. Mr. Greene is a member of the Roman Catholic Church; and he is a militant member. His militancy does not take the form of missionary zeal, of proselytizing. It is, rather, accusatory, fierce. He is concerned, by his own nature, to show the harsher, admonitory side; the side that induces martyrs rather than that which produces the parish priest.

This characteristic shows itself by the hair-shirt quality of his prose. His sentences cut like broken glass. They have a splintered sharpness, like the stark beams of light that cut obliquely across the pictures of El Greco. He may also be compared to the great painter in his odd distortion of vision. He sees his characters, and the scene in which they make their penance, with an eye that elongates them, draws them into thwart gestures made in a garish light. He delights to expose the raw nerves of evil, showing it as a positive force in the world, a skeleton-like figure working visible mischief in the ordinary, everyday affairs of men and women and children. From the dreadful, pathological *gamin* in *Brighton Rock*, to the whisky-saint in *The Power and the Glory*, he introduces the reader to a bitter universe in which the Devil is abroad, utterly malignant and baleful. Only by implication does the protective love of God show through. Only by degrees does the horrified reader see that Graham Greene is possessed of a passionate sense of virtue, which makes sacred the foulest of sinners, and differentiates them from their crimes and servilities.

This may be called a strange, mystical, and even mediæval outlook. But it is a convinced one; so convinced that the author is able to relate it in terms of the most modern, slangy, garish aspects of twentieth-century urban civilization. The world of the advertiser, the gangster, the slum child, the decaying suburb, supplies him with the material which Dante found in Purgatory. And he puts it to the same use.

Here then, is a writer with a bitter flavour which makes him unique in contemporary British letters. Both as novelist, and as writer of travel books such as *Lawless Roads*, his vision is constant in its preoccupation. The cactus, the bare rock, the poisonous snake of





GRAHAM GREENE

Central America, are only other symbols of that acrid criticism of life which he finds in the depraved youth lurking behind the rain-sodden hoardings of the industrial city.

NOVELS: *The Name of Action* (1930), *Heinemann*; *Rumour at Nightfall* (1931); *Stamboul Train* (1932); *Brighton Rock* (1938). TRAVEL: *Journey Without Maps* (1936); *Lawless Roads* (1939), *Longmans*. SHORT STORIES: *The Basement Room* (1936).

DAPHNE DU MAURIER

b. 1907

It is a characteristic paradox of our English habit that for over half a century, one of our most cherished national institutions should have been the French family of Du Maurier. George Du Maurier, the founder of this fame, was the grandson of the aristocratic emigré who fled from France during the Reign of Terror. Both as artist and novelist he is amongst the immortals. His personality was so pronounced that it seems to have impregnated the two following generations of his family, for his son Sir Gerald, the stage idol of Edwardian days, and his granddaughter Daphne, have both had in common with him a special quality which the critic may define with difficulty.

It needs, however, to be defined, for it is the secret of the success of their work. It was so strong in George Du Maurier that throughout the thirty-five years that he drew caricatures for *Punch* it crept into that solid British journal and gave it a fairy quality, a touch of old lace and lavender, of tenderness and love in exile, of gracious manners and noble birth, and finally of a heart-breaking nostalgia. Somehow or other, by a touch of magic, these elements of emotional suggestion emerged in every pen-stroke of Du Maurier's drawings; and when, late in life and already famous, he wrote his three novels, there again the magic shone, particularly in *The Martian*. In that marvellous book there appeared also a loyalty to place, a capacity which the Victorian handed down to the Georgian granddaughter. Nobody, except that granddaughter, could love a house, a particular house, and its garden so devotedly and with such deep-seated tenderness, as George Du Maurier.

These then are the two outstanding features of the temperament which Daphne Du Maurier has brought to her work. True to the



DAPHNE DU MAURIER



family tradition, she was educated in Paris, and returned to work in England. She began writing in 1928, and since then has published six novels and two family histories. These last two I would recommend first to the reader, because they will explain, unconsciously, the unique nature of her novels. *Gerald, A Portrait*, is a life of her father. *The Du Mauriers* deals with the family as a whole. Both books are written in that spirit of reverence which seems to be second nature to the author.

In her novels, however, Daphne Du Maurier has put more emphasis upon the melodramatic element, substituting for her

grandfather's plausibility a take-it-or-leave-it extravagance in the matter of plot, and this results in events of greater violence that can break through the mesh of delicate magic in which the stories as a whole are woven. For example, the burning of the great house at the end of the novel *Rebecca* (her most famous one), comes upon the reader with an additional horror because of the subtlety with which the author has built up so loving a picture of the old family seat, and endowed it with almost agonizing associations.

But these are faults which this writer will be likely to subdue as she matures and mellows. In her novel, *Frenchman's Creek*, the tragic moment is more convincingly assimilated into the story as a whole, and the result is a greater harmony and unity of tone. The book is also a pointer to its author's tendency to work variations upon a family theme. Here, as so often in the work of her grandfather, she delights to play tricks with time and space, using telepathy and hyper-sensitive auto-suggestion to bring together individuals from different centuries and different lands. How far such devices can be used remains to be seen from Miss Du Maurier's future work. She has this advantage, that her introduction of them into her novels is not forced. It is hardly even conscious. It comes from that magic inheritance springing perhaps from so romantic an exile which brought her family to Britain a century and a half ago.

NOVELS: *The Loving Spirit* (1931); *I'll Never Be Young Again* (1932); *The Progress of Julius* (1933); *Jamaica Inn* (1936), *Gollancz*; *Rebecca* (1938), *Gollancz*; *Frenchman's Creek* (1938), *Gollancz*. BIOGRAPHY: *Gerald* (1934), *Gollancz*; *The Du Mauriers* (1937), *Gollancz*.

## SOME STUDIES AND ANTHOLOGIES

THE most systematic and comprehensive introductions to recent British literature are *The Victorians and After, 1830-1914*, by Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobree and *The Present Age, from 1918*, by Edwin Muir, 1938, which deal with every kind of writing from fiction, poetry, and humour, to science and philosophy, and include critical and bibliographical notes on nearly every writer of importance. A shorter guide is *Twentieth Century Literature, 1901-40*, by A. C. Ward, 1940 (Methuen), and a more personal, less formal account of men and movements is given in *The Georgian Literary*

*Scene*, by Frank Swinnerton, 1936 (Dent: Everyman), the work of a distinguished novelist and critic who has known many of the authors of whom he writes. *Tradition and Experiment in Present Day Literature*, 1929 (O.U.P.), contains comparative essays, by well-known critics, on the most important literary forms; and very full lists of writers, their publications, and studies of them, are given in *Contemporary British Literature: Bibliographies and Study Outlines* by F. B. Millett, John M. Manly and E. Rickert, 1939 (Harrap). Many modern books are included in *The English Classics*, a classified and annotated catalogue of cheap editions, compiled by F. Seymour Smith, 1941 (N.B.C.).

The reader who seeks guidance in any particular field may be referred to *Modern English Fiction*, by Gerald Bullett; *The Modern Novel*, by Elizabeth Drew; *The Modern Short Story*, by H. E. Bates, 1940 (Nelson); *Modern Drama*, by J. W. Marriott, 1934 (Nelson); *Poetry at Present*, by Charles Williams, 1930 (O.U.P.); *Eight for Immortality*, by Richard Church, 1941 (Dent); *Post Victorian Poetry*, by Herbert Palmer, 1938 (Dent); and *Modern Poetry*, by Louis MacNeice, 1938 (O.U.P.).

Finally there are many anthologies taken from contemporary literature, of which only a few can be mentioned here:

*Modern Verse*, 1900–40, edited by Phyllis M. Jones, 1941 (O.U.P.); *An Anthology of Modern Verse*, edited by A. M., 1921 (Methuen); *A New Anthology of Modern Verse*, edited by Cecil Day Lewis and L. A. G. Strong, 1941 (Methuen); *A Little Book of Modern Verse*, edited by Ann Ridler, with a preface by T. S. Eliot, 1942 (Faber); *Poems of Our Time*, 1900–42, edited by Richard Church and M. M. Bozman (Everyman's Library).

*Modern English Prose, First (1933) and Second (1938) Series*, edited by Guy Boas (Macmillan); *Modern Prose*, edited by A. J. J. Ratcliff (Nelson).

*Selected English Short Stories*, edited by E. J. O'Brien, 1940; *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories*, edited by Elizabeth Bowen, 1941 (Faber); *Modern Short Stories*, edited by Phyllis M. Jones, 1939 (O.U.P.); *Modern Short Stories*, edited by John Hadfield; *Tales of Detection*, edited by Dorothy L. Sayers; *Ghost Stories*, edited by John Hampden (Dent); *Modern Fiction*, edited by Frank Swinnerton; *Modern Biography*, edited by Lord David Cecil, 1936; *Modern Travel*, edited by H. M. Tomlinson, 1936 (Nelson); *Modern Historical Fiction*, edited by F. W. Tickner, 1936 (Nelson).

*Great Modern British Plays*, edited by J. W. Marriott, 1939; *Plays*

#### SOME STUDIES AND ANTHOLOGIES

*of a Half-Decade*, 1933; *My Best Play*, 1934 (Faber); *Modern Plays*, edited by John Hadfield, *Twenty One-Act Plays*, 1900-38, edited by John Hampden, 1938 (Dent); *Fifty One-Act Plays*, edited by C. M. Martin, 1940 (Gollancz).

*Essays of To-day*, edited by F. H. Pritchard, 1938 (Harrap); *A Hundred English Essays* (including forty modern), edited by Rosalind Vallance (Nelson); *Modern English Essays*, edited by Sir Humphrey Milford (O.U.P., 2 vols.); *English Critical Essays*, Volume II, edited by E. D. Jones, 1939 (O.U.P.).

Admirable brief introductions to the whole field of English literature and drama are provided by *English Literature*, by B. Ifor Evans, and *The British Theatre*, by W. Bridges Adams, 1943 (Longmans). There are considerable sections on twentieth-century literature in two recent volumes: *A Short History of English Literature*, by B. Ifor Evans, 1940 (Penguin) and *The Literature of England*, by W. J. Entwistle and Eric Gillett, 1943 (Longmans).

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