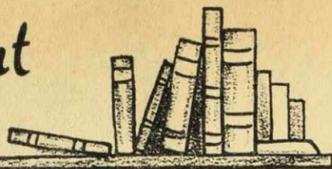


Literary Supplement



Thoughts In Passing . . .

● SOMEONE who professed to know a great deal about Professor Bennet's methods, once let me in on a great secret which I shall pass on to all English 2 students who are "literary" enough to have turned to this page.

"Bennet likes quotations," my informant said, repeating the statement with much gravity. "If you wish to capture a first division in English 2, go to the examination with at least a hundred quotations you can use from memory."

I must confess my ignorance as to whether or not this system will work. In all the English examinations I have written at Dalhousie, I can remember having used only three quotations, two of which were misquoted, and the third was unsuitable. I learned that Professor Bennet will give a pass (and even a first division) on a paper sans quotations. Try the quotation method, however, and let me know how you make out.

IT IS not to be supposed that many students attempt the writing of English themes without relying heavily upon Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. A very valuable book it is, indeed. Theme readers tell me that it is frequently given in footnotes as the source of quotations. Even more valuable, however, would be a collection of misquotations. Had I been able in my examinations to refer to Barthold's Ready Misquotations as the source of the line from Milton or Shakespeare, Professor Bennet would surely have given me an extra mark or two. Such a volume of reference, in addition to forming a refuge for students with non-parrotlike memories, would often provide neat phrases for the summing up of matters for which no apt quotation exists.

The Cynic's Calendar has made a step in this direction. What could better describe the mood of some of the terpsichorean brawls in the Gymnasium than this misquotation from Byron:

"On with the dance! Let joy be unrefined"? Or what truer proverb could apply to some campus figures than this: "You can lead an ass to knowledge — or better, college — but you cannot make him think"? Any romantically inclined sophomore would

agree with The Cynic's Calendar that "the more waist the less speed." Nor does an opportunist require a college degree to know that "a lie in time saves nine." Goldsmith, living as he did before the advent of Kleenex, might as truly have written: "And fools who came to cough, remained to spray."

In these days of great armies, a line from "There'll Always be an England," might be truer, perhaps, if misquoted to read: "Wherever there's a turning, wheel a million marching feet." Everyone must admit that Nelson would have spoken much more truly had he misquoted himself, to say: "England expects every man to do her duty." Misquotations, you see, undoubtedly have value, and often come nearer the truth. May some Dalhousian make himself famous and acquire his M.A. degree by compiling a collection of them.

A MISQUOTATION employed ill-advisedly, however, can result in embarrassment. A member of the Pine Hill faculty tells of having taken part in a religious service at which the local minister was reduced to the position of hymn announcer. Wishing to have a greater share in the proceedings, the minister not only announced each hymn, but read it from beginning to end. All went well until, to show his familiarity with the words of "O God of Bethel", he attempted to quote the hymn from memory. Instead of reciting:

"O spread Thy covering wings around
Till all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode
Our souls arrive in peace."

he unfortunately misquoted:

"O spread Thy covering wings around
Till all our wandering ceases,
And at our Father's loved abode
Our souls arrive in _____."

Well, just how would you finish it off?

In passing, the thought I would leave with you is to be careful when quoting misquotations or misquoting quotations."

The Skyscraper

REACHING up into the immeasurable blue,
Casting a shadow
And caring not,
But seemingly stretching its head
Into another world
Of beauty, that is nothingness,
Space without time
In greys and blues
And azure silence.

Within it the tumult of commerce,
The tapping of keys,
The swish of paper,
Feet moving around
In an eternal rut:
Enterprise for what?

Within it the suave counselor,
A lawyer offering advice,
The client silently impressed
By the seeming wisdom;

An engineer patiently
Drawing plans,
Erecting models;
Progress within steel girders and cement.
And yet it knows not,
Cares less,
Rearing its head into the unknown.

And at its feet
The busy passersby
Move aimlessly along
In a cluttered world
Of details,
That have no place
Of importance
In the lofty free
And windswept heights
Into which the skyscraper
Rears its slim
And graceful form.

DAVID L. VAUGHAN.

BOOK REVIEWS:

Gwethalyn Graham's First Novel: Sinclair Lewis' Nineteenth

Swiss Sonata

by Gwethalyn Graham (Jonathan Cape)

WHEN Earth and High Heaven appeared a year ago last October, few, if any American reviewers remembered Gwethalyn Graham's remarkable first novel, *Swiss Sonata*, which had been published six years previously in 1938. A few Canadian reviewers remembered that *Swiss Sonata* had been awarded the Governor-General's Medal for that year, but otherwise the general comment was that Miss Graham was a "new" writer who showed "remarkable strength and power". Reviewers who "remembered" *Swiss Sonata* seemed only to be quoting Miss Graham's publishers, as though that had been an interesting fact, but in itself not very important. In fact, there was no reference whatever to the book's very fine literary qualities, and absolutely no attempt made to compare the two novels. It is indeed rather a sad commentary on the modern publishing field that a novel such as *Swiss Sonata* could so easily be forgotten: that it should be necessary for an author to publish a book at least every two years, or sink into utter oblivion.

SWISS SONATA is an astonishingly brilliant first novel, but, like Jean Stafford's *Boston Adventure*, it is the sort of a book that is more often talked about than read. Apparently no one bothers to read "a brilliant first novel."

The story itself concerns three days in the lives of a small group of girls in a Swiss boarding school early in January, 1935. The time covered in the book lies immediately prior to the weekend plebiscite in the Saar Basin—the outcome of which "favored" that country's political affiliation with Germany. The girls come from all parts of Europe and America, and their conflicting points of view—their deep social, political, and religious differences—are sharpened and accentuated by the impending outcome of the elections, especially in the case of a young Jewish girl from Saarbrücken, whose father faced inevitable ruin at the hands of the Nazis. Her nerves are wrought to an intense emotional pitch by the continual persecution of a small clique of German girls, who are violently pro-Nazi. The ordinary tension throughout the school, aggravated by a score of petty jealousies and animosities, is wrought to a still greater emotional pitch by several minor incidents in the book—including the tragic death of a young Catholic girl. A character at the beginning of the novel makes the statement: ". . . what we face here the world faces; what we suffer thousands of others suffer in the same way . . . we are but a reflection of the chaos in the outer world . . . if we cannot bring order into our own lives, how can we possibly expect nations to succeed?"

LIKE Earth and High Heaven, *Swiss Sonata* is a thesis novel: but it is magnificently handled, with restraint, humour, intelligence, and a deep, sympathetic insight into the subtleties of human relationships.

Unfortunately, the book has faults of construction. There are far too many characters; and in spite of the fact that the author has gone to great length to supply the peculiar economic and social background of each girl, very few stand out as separate entities with personalities of their own. With the exception of the main character Vicky Morrison, and her friend Theodora Cohen (who are, by the way, splendidly drawn), and one or two others, it is often difficult to understand why each girl acts in the manner she does. One is forever trying to remember that so-and-so comes from England or Norway, and lived such-and-such a life before coming to Switzerland, and then trying to fit her into the general pattern. Obviously that was the author's intention, and she has succeeded magnificently in at least seven of the more important characters. But there are over thirty characters to be considered and remembered, and the result is rather confusing. In fact, the book demands a great deal of the reader—both in time and patience—but it is well worth the effort.

Miss Graham obviously writes very slowly and with great care. Her style is the reflection of an extremely high, cool intelligence, and an almost uncanny insight into the hidden depths of human character. She writes with precision and cool brilliance, but the result is never labored, and never purely intellectual.

Swiss Sonata was started when the author was 21, and was not finished until she was 26. But the result is a minor classic.

—L. M. N.

Cass Timberlane

by Sinclair Lewis (Random House)

EVER since the publication of *Main Street* twenty-five years ago, Sinclair Lewis has been writing continuously, and with but slight variation, on exactly the same theme—a theme that has, for some reason or other, been ostentatiously referred to as "The American Scene". Not very much in the American Scene has escaped Lewis' bitter satire, and in *Cass Timberlane* he has at last come round to the subject of marriage.

Cass Timberlane is called "A Novel of Husbands and Wives", and for once the book-jacket blurb does not exaggerate. It is such a novel. But it is more than that too. In *Main Street* Lewis attacked small-

town smugness; in *Babbitt*, the average American businessman; in *Arrowsmith*, the medical profession. *Cass Timberlane* attacks the American institution of marriage. What Lewis has to say is not very nice. It is, in fact, rather alarming. Interspersed throughout the story of Judge Timberlane and Jinny Marshland (which, by the way, seems rather irrelevant), are a series of sketches of the married lives of a score of prominent citizens of Grand Republic. They constitute in short what Lewis has to say of marriage. Some are funny and amusing, and some are rather poignant. But the general effect is shocking and repellent. Each character is pictured as living a life so completely miserable and rotten, that not to admit at least the partial truth of it is to ignore the fundamental fact that life for a great many people has become at best a tragic farce.

LEWIS throws down this challenge of marriage to Cass and Jinny. However, as if having to contend with a decadent institution were not quite enough, Lewis complicates matters still more. Jinny is pictured as young and bird-like, and rather impetuous—"a half-tamed hawk of a girl, twenty-three or four, not tall, smiling, and lively of eye." Cass, on the other hand, is her direct opposite—reserved, methodical, rather proud, and twenty years her senior. Separated by widely divergent tastes and interests, and having to face the psychological challenge of public skepticism, they are nevertheless determined to make their marriage a success. Miraculously, they do succeed, but one is left with the impression that had this not been fiction things might have been very different. Indeed, how Cass and Jinny finally succeed, Lewis does not explain. Except that Cass and Jinny are both very intelligent and reasonable, and willing to make infinite small compromises, one is left with the impression that they are just somehow different, and that the success of their marriage merely proves the rule that the institution of marriage is rapidly going to pot.

In fact, *Cass Timberlane* merely illustrates once again Lewis' irritating tendency to scratch surfaces, and to make a great deal of fuss about it, but to come up with nothing more spectacular than a fistful of mud. As usual, he has not fought down the temptation to fling a few dirty handfuls at what he has inferred to be the spiritual poverty of modern life. But he is particularly concerned with the stupidity and hypocrisy of modern marriages. He has made a few pointed barbs. He has come close to the truth in not a few instances. But as usual he has offered no solution whatever. He has not even tried to understand. He has been content, again, merely to caricature the surface.

IT IS strange that in spite of knowing as much as we do of Lewis' early life, and especially his non-conformist attitude in college, we should still accept so wholeheartedly and uncritically his intense and sarcastically bitter indictment of the American scene. Lewis has been called a great satirist, but with great exaggeration I think. Satirists, like all artists, are born, but they are unmade by spite. The well-spring of all satire is sincerity—a deep love of mankind and a profound hatred of injustice. The satirist may be, and very often is, bitter—but never spiteful. And if Lewis just misses being a great satirist, it is because he is so often spiteful.

HE IS undoubtedly a clever caricaturist, but his brilliance is nothing more than the glitter of facile writing—frequently crude, sometimes vulgar, but far too often merely smug. He lacks completely a sympathetic insight into the depths of human character and endurance, and a knowledge of the hidden subtleties of human relationships.

Cass Timberlane is not a great book by any means. It is possibly not even a good one. It is, in short, Lewis' nineteenth novel.

—L. M. N.

The Lilies

haunt the garden's edge
and stand like souls along the shore
of time and look forlorn
across the tide of consciousness.

the cycle of the passing year
that saw the green-hued spring,
prismatic summer and the saddened sere
leaves night for their decay
and death that they may sing.

—C.S.W.

In Acknowledgement

To all contributors whose splendid co-operation and support have made this special edition of the Gazette possible, a word of thanks and deep appreciation. Several articles which appeared at the last moment have been withheld due to lack of space, but they will be published at the earliest possible date in January.

A special word of thanks to the Dalhousie Senate for permission to publish Kathryn Bean's prize-winning poem "To An Absentee".



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