

**THE SATURDAY REVIEW
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
11 APRIL 1931**

The Story of *The Reviewer*

INNOCENCE ABROAD. By EMILY CLARK.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1931. \$2.50

Reviewed by HERSCHEL BRICKELL

Exactly a decade has passed since Emily Clark and Hunter Stagg of Richmond, saddened at the death of the only literary page in the city's newspapers, picked up from some one the notion of starting a "little magazine." The suggestion evolved into *The Reviewer*, which every one interested in American literature will recall without effort, although its last Virginia number appeared in 1924, and the last number of the transplanted magazine a year later. "Innocence Abroad" is, in essence, the story of *The Reviewer*, and it is as gay and clever and slyly malicious and entertaining a volume as any one might wish to read, in addition to being a real contribution to the subject of the revival of good writing in the South.

After an introduction devoted to a sketch of the magazine's career, brief, checkered, but consistently honorable, Miss Clark, who proved her worth as an essayist with "Stuffed Peacocks," carries on the charming story by means of a series of sketches of some of the outstanding persons who lent aid of one sort or another to her venture. Most of the literary figures thus discussed helped with personal counsel, contributions, and missionary work; one of them, James Branch Cabell, once went so far as to edit the magazine for three months. The younger authors were glad to write for *The Reviewer* in order to be associated with the bigwigs. Burton Rascoe, once said that Miss Clark's ability to persuade all kinds of people to write for the magazine gratis savored of the miraculous.

Mr. Cabell opens the ball, with Ellen Glasgow coming next—and those readers who do not realize how long ago Miss Glasgow began to write good and bold and significant novels will find an admirable brief evaluation of her work in the chapter devoted to her—and followed by Amelie Rives (Princess Troubetzkoy), Joseph Hergesheimer, H. L. Mencken, Carl Van Vechten, and Ernest Boyd. Then comes a lovely tribute to Elinor

Wylie, whom Miss Clark did not meet until 1924, but whom she seems to know well—there is no finer bit in the book than the description of the dinner the two had in a Half Moon Street hotel, Half Moon Street possessing its own quality—followed by chapters on three of the magazine's contributors who were later to win fame, Frances Newman, Julia Peterkin, and DuBose Heyward. It was Mr. Mencken who wrote Miss Clark about Miss Newman and Mrs. Peterkin, and both really began their literary careers in *The Reviewer's* pages. Mr. Heyward was already known as a poet before he contributed prose to the magazine. The book closes with a combined chapter on Paul Green and Gerald Johnson, both contributors, who were the moving spirits in the eventual transfer of the magazine to North Carolina, where it lasted only one year. An effort was made to pay for contributions, which was probably a fatal mistake, since it so completely violated tradition. There are photographs of all these notable, well reproduced.

Many another famous name enters Miss Clark's pages, for she met the great and near-great on her trips to New York to round up material, and also in Richmond; Sinclair Lewis promised to write something for *The Reviewer* but never did, and might be expected, there were other failures, but the average was strikingly high. Not content with making established authors write pieces for her, Miss Clark infected many with her enthusiasm, and sent them out as missionaries to gather in further contributions. Robert Nathan sent her one of his most delightfully characteristic poems, which Miss Clark has graciously reprinted in her book, since it is not hard to come by—I wonder what a complete file of *The Reviewer* might bring about now?—Ronald Firbank wrote for the magazine, and John Galsworthy, Arthur Machen and Edwin Muir, Gertrude Stein and **Aleister Crowley**, Achmed Abdullah—"Captain Abdullah's single adventure in fame without specie" comments Miss Clark—and Margery Latimer. . . .

Miss Clark is too busily engaged in telling her high-spirited story to try to underline the accomplishments of *The Reviewer*, but those of us who recall the state of letters in the South at the time of the appearance of Mr. Mencken's famous diatribe, "The Sahara of the Bozart," will be inclined to give *The Reviewer* no small share of the credit for the existing state of affairs, when, as DuBose Heyward says, "It is almost as chic in literature to be a Southerner as to be a Negro." Jestings aside, if Miss Clark's magazine had done no more than nourish the budding talent of Julia Peterkin, it would have justified its exist-

tence, but it actually did a great deal more. It was an intelligently conducted experiment from the first, unbusinesslike, assuredly, but with high standards. And it deserved just the sort of history that has been written in "Innocence Abroad," a book that no one seriously interested in the recent history of our literature can neglect, and a book that no one who is capable of enjoying really first-rate talk about writers and their work should overlook. I do not see how Miss Clark could have done her job more engagingly; it is not difficult to understand how she accomplished what she did with *The Reviewer* after a careful reading of her book.