

so I'd put my money on him. I'm a bit like the average punter. I study the form charts, but I don't necessarily know anything about the horses from first-hand experience. I may not go to the race-track to see them run, but I make my pick and place my bets. As a bookseller I often have to rely on a sort of sixth sense that urges me to invest in a certain book or author, and I think the same thing can be applied in this case. Bernard Shaw has of course already stood the test of time for 50 years or so, and I'd place first on my list his *Saint Joan* because of its great dramatic excitement—a physical as well as an intellectual excitement—and because in that play he has got beyond himself. Second, I would put T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, for its tremendous appeal as an exciting story, with underneath it the feeling of someone trying to work out fundamental values, and Winston Churchill's *The Second World War*, which may date as far as style goes, but should live for its story and because he lived through what he describes. Next I would put a selection of T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*—that's a case of a book which seems difficult now but may have a wider appeal as time goes on. On a slightly lower plane—probably not on our list, but close to it—Virginia Woolf, for some of her slighter essays like that one where she goes out into the streets of London to buy a pencil, because she gives us something unique in them, not only in her sensibility, but in the language she uses to express herself. On the same level Bertrand Russell for one of his less popular works like his *Principles of Mathematics*, because one feels that here is an acute mind saying something new, breaking new ground, yet saying something fundamental.

SHAW IS TOO TOPICAL

(Prof. P. S. Arden, at present attached to English Department, Victoria University College)

I MET a Welshman yesterday and he told me that in every Welsh household there are two books—the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. I can't think of any two books in our time that might endure in that way. What makes them endure anyway? Permanent value.

Q.: How are you to assess permanent value?

P.S.A.: How are you to assess any matter of taste? It's difficult. For one thing a future classic won't have to be too topical, it will have to be truthful, and it will have to have a general human appeal, not a particular appeal. Then again a work may have an artistic value that far outweighs any topical disability. For instance, take a Renaissance painting of a Madonna and Child, and consider the numbers of people who enjoy and admire that painting even if it has

no particular religious significance for them. John Masefield's *Gallipoli* is topical, but it may live through its literary power and its emotional power.

Now Shaw is too topical. He won't last. Maybe some of his earlier plays; *St. Joan* probably, because it deals with a dramatic and "significant historical event; *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, Mrs. Warren's *Profession* may last—because Mrs. Warren's was a very old profession. But I shouldn't expect much of the rest.

Then there's an even more dangerous thing than plain topicality and that's topical mood. For example, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, with their adulation of the Prince Consort and other Victorian emotions that are quite debunked now. There's topical mood for you—makes best sellers but not classics. Does anyone ever read *Anthony Adverse* now?

Q.: Do you suggest that one might safely skip all best-sellers?

P.S.A.: Well hardly that. The Authorized Version of the Bible is a best-seller—but true, it began its big circulation by authority, so perhaps it should not count. A book I might expect to live is Galsworthy's *Man of Property*. It's in a doldrum now, but I think it may pick up. It has the great virtue of honesty, truth to the scene of the upper-lower-middle class of England.

TWO AND TWO

(Thelma Maurais, Editor, School Publications)

OF course the hardest thing to work out is what the conditions for survival might be. Anyway, all our editorial staff had a lot of fun talking it over, and we agreed first on E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, which I thought had more of the "classic" quality than *A Passage to India*. I also

favoured Ivy Compton-Burnett, and I'd be inclined to go for her, hook, line and sinker, and include all her novels. Of the poets we agreed that T. S. Eliot was likely to become a classic, and another suggestion was Robert Frost. Then someone thought of Trevelyan's *Social History*, but eventually we demolished him completely, and we followed that up by wiping out nearly all the minor women—Mary Webb, Winifred Holtby, Vera Britten, Phyllis Bentley—for various reasons, retaining only Virginia Woolf. To the *Lighthouse* is I suppose the obvious choice for her, although some of us thought *The Common Reader* might be the one book of hers to live.

NO COTERIE WRITING

(A. E. Campbell, Director, Council for Educational Research)

NEGATIVELY speaking one could say that writings which are technical or addressed to small groups or cliques—coterie writing—won't survive for long, and I think this applies to much modern poetry. I should say the main quality required of any work likely to become a classic is readability. It must be entertaining, and interesting, and have great directness, simplicity and honesty of approach. I think there should also be a noble breadth of spirit and the quality of touching life closely—"seeing life steadily and seeing it whole," as Matthew Arnold said. On these grounds I would pick something by A. N. Whitehead, perhaps his *Adventures of Ideas*, and Arnold Toynbee's *History of Western Civilisation*; T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*; Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, because it gives a complete picture of a period (although a little over-sentimentalised) and is a living social document with the intrinsic interest of a

good story; some of the early Wells—*Kipps* or *Mr. Polly*—for their sheer liveliness and gusto; and for an essayist Virginia Woolf's *The Common Reader*.

TIME WILL TELL

(G. T. Alley, Director of National Library Service)

"THE whole idea is horrible—an arbitrary list of 23 or even 100 classics, no allowance for borderline cases, it's wrong. Impossible to make a short list—one name leads to another, and then to another. Interesting to make a symposium, but one is not enough; you need many symposia, many panels, long discussion."

Q.: "Could you suggest some requirements for a classic?"

G.T.A.: "Even the word is wrong! Say a thing's a classic and you've labelled it dead!"

Q.: "Well, shall we call it a best-laster?"

G.T.A.: "Yes; or a last-bester. It must jump fences, leap boundaries. Without being perfect, it must do its particular job very well. If we relate it to human needs, and we must relate it to human needs, then a railway timetable could be a classic—if enough depended on it at a particular time, a turn of history, the fate of a people."

Mr. Alley turned in his chair and reached for a book, scattered the pages over, and began to read a passage on reading, the mental and physical activity of reading. Then he reached for Adler's *How to Read a Book*, turned a few pages, shut it with a look of distaste, clasped his hands together and gazed at his desk, not apparently seeing anything particular on it.

"And remember, for every great book there's a horde of subsidiary people, the little fish who interpret and explain. You can't imagine the Himalayas with just Everest and Kanchen Janga sticking up there by themselves with nothing round them, just flatness."

Q.: "Will you name any present-day Everests-to-be?"

G.T.A.: "T. S. Eliot, Joyce, Whitehead, Bertrand Russell—but this classical garment doesn't fit anyone. Take a nuclear physicist—he has certainly broken boundaries; but in our time we cannot assess him, we simply haven't the knowledge. In fact, the knowledge with which we choose our giants is restricted and small. It may be that our time will come to be known for the writings of Einstein. We can't tell. We'd better have him on our list."

Mr. Alley got up and walked about the room, sighing about the difficulty, the doubtful enjoyment of trying to draw the curtains aside. "Weather forecasting," he muttered, and walked some more. Suddenly he stopped walking, stopped frowning, smiled quite peacefully and said:

"It is pleasant to feel that Time will deal very capably with the problem."

TWENTY-THREE BRITISH CLASSICS

THE British Ministry of Education has issued a list (on which comment has been invited) of 23 British classics which it has recommended should be included in the list of 100 of the world's best books now being prepared by UNESCO. Here is the British list:

Jane Austen, "*Pride and Prejudice*"; Francis Bacon, "*Essays*"; William Blake, "*Songs of Innocence and Experience*"; James Boswell, "*Life of Samuel Johnson*"; Emily Bronte, "*Wuthering Heights*"; John Bunyan, "*Pilgrim's Progress*"; Robert Burns, selected poems; Geoffrey Chaucer, "*Canterbury Tales*"; Charles Darwin, "*Origin of Species*"; Daniel Defoe, "*Robinson Crusoe*"; Charles Dickens, "*David Copperfield*"; George Eliot, "*Middlemarch*"; Edward Gibbon, "*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*"; John Keats, poems; Sir Thomas Malory, "*Morte d'Arthur*"; John Stuart Mill, "*On Liberty*"; John Milton, poetical works; Alexander Pope, "*Essay on Man*"; Sir Walter Scott, "*Heart of Midlothian*"; William Shakespeare, complete works (or if a selection has to be made—"Hamlet", "*Macbeth*", "*The Tempest*", "*Twelfth Night*", "*King Henry IV.*", parts one and two, "*King Lear*", "*Julius Caesar*", "*Midsummer Night's Dream*", "*Antony and Cleopatra*", "*Venus and Adonis*", the sonnets); Percy Bysshe Shelley, selected poems; Jonathan Swift, "*Gulliver's Travels*"; William Wordsworth, selected poems.

The committee of experts responsible for the list comprised Professor C. M. Bowra, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford; Professor B. Willey, professor of English at Cambridge; John Hampden, head of the literature group of the British Council; and V. S. Pritchett, author and critic.



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