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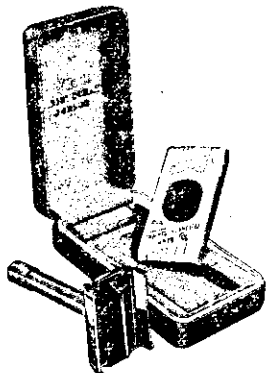
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L.I.B.



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Books

YANKEE SUPERMAN

THE LETTERS OF EZRA POUND, 1907-1941; edited by D. D. Paige; *ABC OF READING*, by Ezra Pound; Faber and Faber, English prices, 25/- and 8/6.

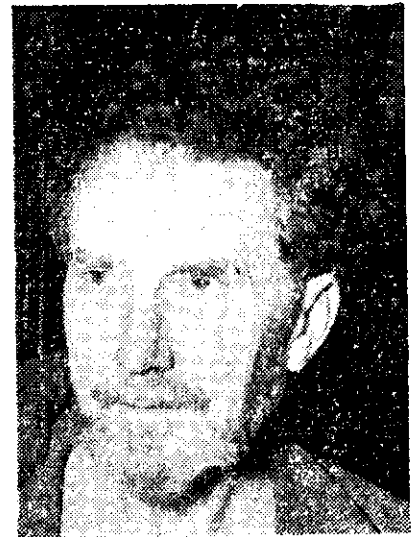
(Reviewed by P.J.W.)

HE left Pennsylvania University with an angry roar and hit literary London like a New England hurricane, blowing down the Georgian idols with old-fashioned Yankee vituperation. Contemporary poetry was compounded of "verse-slush and too many adjectives," Chesterton was "slop," Meredith "chiefly a stink." By his demand for absolute purity and precision of expression, in his talk, his written criticism, and the example of his poetry, Ezra Pound did more than anyone to create the poetic revolution of the 'twenties. The most apt of his young disciples was T. S. Eliot.

His talent was so great that he thought he was Superman. But if he was arrogant, irascible, and unpredictable, the great light shining through these letters and the advice to young poets in *ABC of Reading* (a reprint) is his passionate concern for literature. It is seen in the formation of the *Bel Esprit* society "to help civilisation to survive through better literature and art by releasing certain artists." Thirty guarantors were to provide £10 a year for life for the first potential recipient, T. S. Eliot, who had twice broken down while working at his London bank. Again and again in both of these books he makes penetrating comments on the craft of writing poetry. He hated mediocrity, dullness, and woolly writing: "Literature is news that stays news"; "There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions"; "Rhythm MUST have meaning"; "Would to God I could see a bit more Sophoclean severity in the ambitions of *mes amis et mes confrères*, the general weakness of the writers of the new school is looseness, lack of rhythmical construction and intensity."

He became the god of the younger writers, who sent him manuscripts to be criticised, told him their worries, and received in reply staccato typewritten advice that cut to the bone: "Dear F/ Yrz/ to hand. Partly horse sense an' partly NUTS. Poetical prose??? Hell!! The great writing in either p or p consists in getting the SUBJECT matter onto paper with the fewest possible folderols and antimacassars." But gradually egomania began to replace the early scintillating brilliance. He named his son Homer Shakespeare Pound for "the crescendo effect," and became the champion of Mussolini and Douglas Credit. For his wartime broadcasts on Rome Radio he was imprisoned in a cage, tried for treason, dubbed the American Lord Haw Haw, and placed in a lunatic asylum.

These writings show little of the tragedy of Pound's career. They display him mainly in his full glory as the cantankerous, red-bearded young expatriate who dined with Henry James and lived in Surrey with W. B. Yeats. Among the score of then obscure writers he boosted were T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Amy Lowell, "H.D.," Wyndham Lewis, Richard Aldington, and Robert Frost. He started a poetic movement called the Imagists, and shoved



EZRA POUND

"Arrogant, irascible and unpredictable"

down the public throat his pet subjects — Greek and Provençal poetry, Dante, Chinese and Japanese literature. His domination was enormous. Not even the Olympian Yeats escaped his influence.

There is much here on Eliot's early poems (Eliot addressed him as *Cher Maître*), and on the "imbecile suppression" of *Ulysses*; dozens of bullying and cajoling letters to Harriet Monroe in his attempt to set up an American magazine which would publish only the best in modern writing. After London and Paris he went to Rapallo. Here his letters, to people like George Santayana, H. L. Mencken, or Ronald Duncan, contain much about his own poems and their remarkable experiments in technique. But the decline is setting in. The vitality of his Yankee slang turns more and more into affectation. He knew that his big oracular hour had passed, and significantly, his last letters are addressed to Katue Kitasono, an admirer in distant Japan.

PATIENCE AND ZEAL

THE COMING OF THE FLOWERS, by A. W. Anderson; Williams and Norgate. English price, 10/6.

BOTANICAL EXPLORERS OF NEW ZEALAND, by Rewa Glenn; A. H. and A. W. Reed, 10/6.

A RETROSPECT OF FLOWERS, by Andrew Young; Jonathan Cape. English price, 10/6.

THESE three books deal with more or less the same subjects—the origins or discoveries of plants—but deal with these subjects in different ways. Mr. Anderson, who is Curator of the Timaru Botanical Gardens, takes the flowers in his garden as he comes upon them, and tells their histories with a great deal of zest and evident enjoyment. His book has no index and no particular order, and is clearly meant to be a casual book of interest and pleasure to flower lovers and gardeners; but with so many odd and fascinating snippets and paragraphs of information it seems a pity that there is not a full index. As it is, it can be recommended to readers interested in gardens and in the strange and adventurous origins and discoveries of some of our common or uncommon plants.

Miss Glenn gave a series of radio talks on the botanical explorers of New Zealand and adapted the material to make

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