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Gene Tunney's Tale



Two masters of ring-craft, G. B. S. and Gene Tunney

THE autobiography of Gene Tunney is a welcome and interesting addition to the literature of prize-fighting, an art which has inspired less good writing than perhaps any other sport of its popularity and history. Between Hazlitt's famous essay and Shaw's early novel scarcely half a dozen pieces of memorable literature have been inspired either by the old noble art—the art of raw brawn—or by the modern ring with

Books Reviewed

A MAN MUST FIGHT. By Gene Tunney. (Cape. 7/6 net.)

THE TORRENTS OF SPRING. By Ernest Hemingway, with a preface by David Garnett. (Cape. 5/-.)

REMINISCENCES OF D. H. LAWRENCE. By J. Middleton Murry. (Cape. 7/6.)

its fabulous purses, rackets, and publicity—the art of science and finesse—which has had perhaps its greatest exponent in Tunney himself.

It is appropriate that Shaw should have something to say about Tunney and his book, for Shaw is a great writer who finds pleasure in boxing, and Tunney a great boxer who has found such pleasure in books that at one time he was regarded by the American boxing fraternity as just a soft-hearted, soft-headed "big sissy," whom Dempsey would slaughter before the end of the first round. Shaw plainly admires Tunney as much as Tunney is reported to admire Shaw.

"Carpentier had married and gone comparatively soft when he met Dempsey, and seemed like a light-weight giving an exhibition spar against you, just as Dempsey with his fiddling and feinting looked like a schoolboy fooling with an instructor. . . . You came, you saw, you overcame. By doing so you have inevitably belittled them, and have taken less credit for your victories than a completely objective historian would give you."

This modesty of Tunney's is, indeed, the most charming thing about "A Man Must Fight." In the eyes of the ordinary reader it may seem as if Tunney's achievements were easy and unextraordinary, so quietly and reticently does he relate them, from the time of his back-street fights to the moment when he was hitting Dempsey so hard that

Some Scraps of the Ring and the Book Bernard Shaw on Boxing

Dempsey himself said of one single punch:

"It was not a question of being knocked out—I thought I was going to die."

But the enthusiast, the fan, will know that nothing can detract from that achievement. To have fought scores of fights and never to have been knocked down, let alone knocked out, until that

By H. E. Bates

count for nine in the Dempsey fight, is a feat that must be unparalleled in the modern ring.

"Truly," said Hazlitt, "the Fancy are not men of imagination." The words are still true to-day. The procession of dull-witted heavy-weights across the modern ring has been pathetic. It is a pleasure to read of the exploits of a man who possessed not only a magnificent body, but a splendid brain, and the imagination and power to use them both, and who, having used them to attain his purpose, had also the sense to retire.

There is only one thing more depressing than the boxer's "come-back." And that is the spectacle of the once-victorious fighter dragging out a depraved existence as a street-tout.

The life of the greatest boxer is short. It is typical of Tunney that he recognised that truth. And it illustrates, also, perfectly, what kind of modesty fills his book—a book that should be read by all who are in the remotest sense interested in "the noble art."

Mr. Ernest Hemingway, whose own contribution to the literature of prize-fighting is a memorable story called "Fifty Grand," has taken a satirical holiday, as it were, in writing "The Torrents of Spring."

It was evident from Hemingway's early work that he had been much influenced by the writing of his fellow-countryman, Sherwood Anderson. There appeared a book of Anderson's, however, which even Hemingway could not stomach. "Dark Laughter" appeared, indeed, so ludicrous and false to Hemingway that he set out to satirize it, or, more truly, to parody it. And in "The Torrents of Spring" he has succeeded in ridiculing and parodying Anderson in a very salutary and amusing fashion, but he has also, as Mr. David Garnett remarks in his preface, succeeded in parodying himself and in throwing some valuable light on his own work.

"The short abrupt sentence, weighted with inarticulate masculinity such as is employed in the advertisements of men's boots and manly brands of tobacco, is a style which has been used by Hemingway. He is a great artist, and he has got some of his best effects by this method. 'The Torrents of Spring' shows that he is a conscious artist who knows just what he is doing. One finds him continually laughing at himself."

That attitude of Hemingway's is, indeed, most refreshing and salutary. It is unfortunate that Mr. Middleton Murry cannot, even when dealing with a subject so important as D. H. Lawrence, see his way to adopt a similar one.

Like Mrs. Carswell, to whose recent "Savage Pilgrimage" his book is an answer, he might fairly be accused of taking Lawrence too seriously. And in "Reminiscences of D. H. Lawrence" he

can quite as justly be accused of taking himself, and Mrs. Carswell, with too much self-centred gravity.

The issues involved in this controversy, which has begun to take on some of the aspects of a literary cat-fight, are too many to be debated in this short article. Nor do they add to one's knowledge of Lawrence and his work. And whether Mr. Murry is right or wrong, whether Mrs. Carswell is wise or foolish, this surely is the only standard by which a new work on him can be judged. And in the present absence of any cool, critical exposition of Lawrence's work it is a little difficult to find patience for incoherent essays written in the heat of controversial bitterness.

The time has not yet come for a biography of Mr. Murry himself; but the time has come for a detached and unhysterical consideration of Lawrence's work as a novelist. If we cannot have that, if no critic feels equal to an impersonal analysis undefiled by petty reminiscences of Lawrence quarrelling with his wife and Mr. Murry, of Lawrence breaking crockery and helping to wash up—as though, indeed, he were the only author who ever washed his wife's dishes!—then it would be well if books about him were to be prohibited for the next ten years. In the interval we could content ourselves with Lawrence himself.

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