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Character and Culture: Essays on East and West (Library of Conservative Thought)

Irving Babbitt

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Character and Culture by Irving Babbitt is the latest volume in the Library of Conservative Thought. Babbitt was the leader of the twentieth-century intellectual and cultural movement called American Humanism or the New Humanism. More than half a century after his death his intellectual staying power remains undiminished. The qualities that marked Irving Babbitt as a thinker and cultural critic of the first rank are richly represented in *Character and Culture.* First published togetherin 1940 (under the misleading title *Spanish Character),* these essays span his scholarly career and cover a wide range of subjects. The diverse topics discussed here—aesthetics, ethics, religion, politics, literature—are illuminated by the same unifying vision of human existence that informs and structures all of Babbitt's writing.

Babbitt never took up a subject out of idle curiosity. All of his books and articles grew out of a desire to address certain fundamental questions of life and letters. The essaysin this volume are as worthy of attention now as when they were originally written. Set in then- philosophical and historical context by Claes G. Ryn's new introduction, they are a good place to start for persons who wish to acquaint themselves not only with Babbitt's central ideas but with the scope of his mind and interests. Readers familiar with other books by Babbitt may recognize particular ideas and formulations but will also find much new material to ponder.

Ryn's introduction provides a comprehensive look at Irving Babbitt's life, career, writings, and influence. He shows how Babbitt has survived and sustained often harsh criticism from representatives of dominant trends. Ryn describes his writing style as having "a kind of rugged American elegance." The substantial critical introduction also elucidates Babbitt's central ideas in relation to the volume. *Character and Culture* will be of interest to scholars of literature, philosophers, historians, theologians, and political theorists. The extensive index to all of Babbitt's books, including this one, increases the value of the volume.

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