Informal Adventure

OF all this rich and varied book, from its stories of Yale crews and coaches through its sea tales of the "Three Friends", its anecdotes of Roosevelt, I like best the very last of it which deals with the war. What a vivid bit of history Ralph Paine tells, when he recounts the way he finally dared the base at Queenstown! How he belies the following anecdote:

Only one incident occurred to mar the cruise, and this was when an infantile bluejacket of some seventeen years was overheard to remark to a mate:

"That's Paine up on the bridge, the man that writes stories. They say he's a pretty good guy, but don't you think he's too blamed old to be bangin' around out here in a destroyer?"

"Roads of Adventure" (Houghton Mifflin) is, in the main, autobiographical chapters from the life of a newspaper correspondent. At least, this is the atmosphere that Paine has chosen to give it. Amusing incident does not fail. There is color, romance, and fact. Surely, however, stopping to quarrel in such a book of doing and daring is absurd. Why this?

It was a minor episode of history, but gorgeously romantic against the quiet background of twenty-five years ago, when American life was unvexed by wars or foreign relations or the loud cries of the Young Intellectuals as they cease from praising one another long enough to toss overboard the morals, manners, and ideals of all the generations of mankind that have preceded them.

The intimate picture of Stephen Crane is a good one. Here is an entertaining bit — a picture of the difficult Crane, whipped into being a newspaper man.

"For heaven's sake, Steve, sit down and write some of the stuff. We left you here to cover the fight, and you've got it all. As soon as we catch up with the story, I must run this vessel back to Port Antonio and keep the cable busy. Duck into the cabin and write."

Crane paid no attention, but continued to talk about the marines. These practical, uninspired newspaper men were a confounded nuisance. They and their absurd demands were to be brushed aside. McCready tried bribery — beer and cigarettes — and Crane consented to dictate a dispatch, although very much bored. It was a ridiculous scene — McCready, the conscientious reporter, waiting with pencil and paper — Crane, the artist, deliberating over this phrase or that, finicky about a word, insisting upon frequent changes and erasures, and growing more and more suspicious. Finally he exclaimed:

"Read it aloud, Mac, as far as it goes. I believe you are murdering my stuff."

"I dropped out a few adjectives here and there, Steve. This has to be *news*, sent at cable rates. You can save your flub-dub and shoot it to New York by mail. What I want is the straight story of the fight."

Ralph Paine left them wrangling bitterly, with small hope of a satisfactory adjustment. He had been so absorbed in Crane's recital of events that he had forgotten his haste to get ashore and investigate this small battle at first hand. He noticed that the scattering fire from the camp and from the chaparral had ceased. It was a morning lull. The Spanish sharpshooters had bethought themselves of breakfast, or such was the deduction, and the marines were in a mood to second the motion.

—*J. F.*