Imagine a book that starts like an essay on modern philosophy, continues like a confession, goes at a bound into fiction, shifts into the manner of a Kipling fairy tale, and ends in perfect consistency with them all. Such is Stella Benson's "This Is the End" (Macmillan; $1.35). One may take it quite literally, and remain puzzled by a few various matters. It is fairly safe to say that however one takes it there will still be puzzling things about it. What a reader gets from it, after all, will be in proportion to the imagination, sympathy, and intelligence that he brings. Was it Sainte-Beuve who maintained that in reading over old papers one never finds more than half the matter in print? The other half lies in the minds of contemporary readers and constitutes by no means the least effectual part. Every significant book stimulates its readers to the office of participant; Miss Benson's does so in a peculiar degree.

One imagines that Miss Benson must be something like her own Jay. For Jay "was a person who took nothing in the world for granted, but as she had only a slight connection with the world, that is not saying very much. Nothing ever embittered Jay, not even her own pessimism. There is a finality about bitterness and Jay was never final." You may look upon Jay's secret story as "an imaginary hieroglyphic," if you will; you may look upon Miss Benson's story as a fantasy, an extravaganza, a symbol, or a subtle comment upon contemporary life. It is all these in part, and therefore people will enjoy it for different reasons and in different ways. She herself says: "This is the end, for the moment, of all my thinking, this is my unfinal conclusion. There is no reason in tangible things, and no system in the ordinary ways of the world. Hands were made to grope, and feet to stumble, and the only things you may count on are the unaccountable things. There are no reasons except reasons you and I don't know. . . But if the things which I know in spite of my education were false, if the eyes of the sea forgot their secret, or if the accent of the steep woods became vulgar, if the fairy adventures that happen in my heart fell flat, if the good friends my eyes have never seen failed me—then indeed should I know emptiness, and an astonishment that would kill."

No account of the book would be complete that did not mention the war, for the war is through it, beneath it, part of its very making, and yet always unobtrusive. The war is a humorous thing, it is a commonplace thing, it is an overwhelming, flat, disillusioning thing that descends and robs the world of all hope and of all light. Perhaps it is superfluous to add that Miss Benson is a writer of unusual skill. She is, however, something more than brilliant, humorous, and fantastic. What this something is, she sends out a challenge to the individual reader to discover.

Perhaps F. T. Wawn's "The Joyful Years" is best described as a first-rate, second-rate novel. It is one of those stories of solid worth which only the English writers seem able to produce. On every page there is evidence of the trained thinker and writer who has observed life. There is never a hint of "inspiration," none of the slovenliness of the "divine fire." At the start one meets several interesting people, and having found them to be genuine people and not "characters," one settles comfortably back, knowing that whatever happens will make interesting reading. There is a middle-aged journalist with a whimsical philosophy and a delicious cynicism; there is a young woman who is mildly rebellious toward the British respectability of her family; then there is a young clerk of excellent family but with no prospects, and against him there is the successful Official, his employer and rival in love. Of course there is nothing new in the situation, but there is much that is new in the way the various characters develop under that situation. It is this avoidance of effort at originality in plot which is so admirable, for the true artist finds his material in character rather than situation and is as much interested in what his people think as in what they do. It is worth remarking, in passing, that although the war plays a part in the story, it is handled with some perspective. The book may be recommended for those who enjoy a good story well told. (Dutton; $1.50.)

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Whenever the reviewer finds a subject that is commonly a novelist's excuse for sensation, actually treated with relative truth and soberness, his impulse is to give the author hearty acclamation irrespective of the real value of his performance. Joseph McCabe, in "The Pope's Favorite" (Dodd, Mead; $1.50), has succeeded in giving a truthful representation of the reign (one can call it no less) of Alexander VI, the Borgia Pope. His knowledge of the times has perhaps led him a little astray as far as narrative unity is concerned; his story is more an incidental description of the lives and deeds of that notorious personage, his *favorita* Giulia, and the papal "nephew" and "niece," Cesare and Lucrezia, than it is a properly conducted plot. But by smashing a number of cherished traditions concerning Rodrigo Borgia, he represents him as a really very possible sort of person. If the title cause the reader to expect a book that he will conceal behind a magazine in public, he will be misled. It is hardly *pour les jeunes filles,* neither is it for the sensation seekers. It is simply a good historical novel—one of the best that it has been our luck to see in a long time.

Why cannot authors get together a bit in this matter of plot and setting? Why must we be subjected invariably to a Broadway plot in a Broadway setting, and to an Alaskan plot in an Alaskan setting? Stage a Baroness Orczy story in the Yukon, for instance, and you might have something rather piquant. These dispiriting reflections are caused by the perusal of a new snow-and-primitive-man tale entitled "The Yukon Trail," by William MacLeod Raine (Houghton Mifflin; $1.35). It will be all the same to you whether you read this novel or any one of half a dozen of the same variety of the present season. It is a fairly plausible, well-planned yarn that clings to the traditions of its type and its setting.

One seldom encounters a book which may be added to the group of which "Huckleberry Finn" and "The Story of a Bad Boy" are the classics. Although Edward Bellamy Partridge by no means approaches those two stories in "Sube Cane" he has nevertheless written an authentic story of boyhood. It is quite true that "Sube" is "all boy." His is the ingenuity and ingenuousness of adolescence and those who have a furtive sympathy with the innate genius for mischief which characterizes youth will find a humor which does not tax their credulity or patience. The author knows the psychology of boys and has written a story in which there is a genuine appreciation of a boy's character and mind. (Penn; $1.35.)

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