RECENT BOOKS IN BRIEF REVIEW

MOST "timely biographies" must be listed among the Biblia Abiblia—the books that are not books. The distinctive features of such publications are a tone of indiscriminate adulation and a lack of style. To the publishers of such ephemeral nonsense, "J. Ramsay MacDonald: The Man of Tomorrow" (Seltzer) by "Iconoclast" stands as a reproach. The anonymous British novelist and writer who is the author evidently worships the Labor premier. But that worship does not express itself in reciting the prescribed phrases and performing the traditional genuflections. "Iconoclast" has made "an effort to comprehend his [MacDonald's] character rather than describe his action". The facts of his life, though they are recounted, are not the essence of the work. The spirit, which made that life worth recording, is. The fact that the book was completed before MacDonald became premier makes it no less complete, nor can Oswald Garrison Villard's worthy introduction make it more significant.

Waldo Frank has done an interesting and honest thing in "Salvos" (Boni, Liveright), under which title he has collected a number of artistic criticisms published in various journals since 1916. They are reprinted, he says, without alteration, despite the fact that in many cases he erred in judgment or prophetic skill. Instead of revising the essays before publication in book form, he appends to each a short discussion showing how his opinion has changed since the date of writing. Persons who know Frank only through his sometimes incomprehensible fiction will discover a different prose in these discussions, and the change is all in favor of clarity. A tendency toward pedantry and bombastic effects does not spoil the book.

A. T. Olmstead does not endorse the generally accepted view, in his well written and comprehensive "History of Assyria" (Scribner). He believes that Byron's famous line, "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold", is merely a poetical exaggeration; he maintains that the Assyrians were no more inhuman, no more ruthless than the other warlike and conquering nations of ancient times; he demonstrates that they had a wide reaching culture which was not a mere offshoot of the Babylonian, but which took on an original turn both in political and in artistic directions; and he provides ample evidence to justify his conclusion that the Assyrian "was the shepherd-dog of civilization, and he died at his post". "All in all", we are told, "he was a man, and a capable man; he suffered the usual human limitations, he was a child of his age. The empire he founded marked a milestone in the long and heartbreaking advance toward a higher civilization."

The reputations of contemporary writers of popular fiction fluctuate as surprisingly and as rapidly as the quotations of the stock market. With this fact in mind, the modern editor might very well say to a young writer, "There is, of course, no great harm in knowing how to tell a tale, but it is much more to your advantage and mine

to know your public." Unfortunately no textbook of the art of writing can teach the earnest student which way the cat of public taste will jump. So reliable a handbook as Dr. J. Berg Esenwein's "Writing the Short-Story" (Hinds, Hayden, Eldredge), of which a new edition has just appeared, essays only to point out the methods and achievements of past masters in the art. From the point of view of the needs of editors of our million-circulation magazines, much of Dr. Esenwein's elaborate classification of plot, setting, and characters must be restricted to an academic serviceability. But its essential soundness can hardly be questioned, nor can we quarrel with the author's selection of examples from the work of established masters of the craft. Perhaps the most practical advice in the book for the beginning writer today is contained in that section entitled "Preparation for Authorship". Such dicta as this, if taken more generally to heart, would add many years of service to the average life of the gentle manuscript reader.

Pulling laurels from the brows of heroes is one way of delighting the multitude. Jean de Pierrefeu proceeds to attract a crowd by this device in "Plutarch Lied" (Knopf) and then delivers his lecture on the usefulness of professional militarism. Strategy is outmoded and futile, this ex-lieutenant contends. The great strategists all failed as soldiers. The successes of our allied heroes were largely lucky blunders. As for the late war, its first period consisted of a useless attempt to apply a dead art to modern conditions. When that attempt failed and the armies dug in on the Aisne, four year of chaos followed. Only the last months of the war revealed the possibilities of future warfare. The exposition of such a thesis requires much graphic illustration; there is not a map in the book.

"Sea Songs and Ballads, 1917-22" (Houghton Mifflin) is a spirited collection of salt water poetry by C. Fox Smith. In simple, swinging rhythms it tells of ancient ships and sailor men and the voyages of the "old days", growing very nautical at times and packed with the magical names of far places. So salt are these verses to the taste and so boldly do they sing themselves out, that one is willing enough to overlook the occasional slips in metre. Some of the best are the simplest, "Follow the Sea", for example, and "The Flying-Fish Sailor". Not one of them has the least touch of sentimentality; they are bluff, hearty, masculine — and written by a woman.

There are many books of travel which, without making any particular literary pretensions or embodying any material that is startling or unique, are moderately interesting as narratives and moderately informative as indices to the localities they describe. Such are "The Lure of the Riviera" and "The Lure of French Châteaux" by Frances M. Gostling (McBride). Both of these volumes will prove fairly entertaining; both will be welcomed by travelers as well as by those book lovers who do their traveling by proxy only; both contain numerous scenic descriptions and a store of agreeable anecdotes; and neither stands out conspicuously, nor perhaps is designed to stand out conspicuously, from the mass of travel books continuously issuing from our press.

Arthur Symons won his critical spurs so long ago that one is inclined

to take his winged riding for granted. His exquisite intuition, the catholicity of his taste, his genius for the right word, have become a matter of course. If his latest book "Dramatis Personæ" (Bobbs-Merrill) lacks something of the flame of his earlier work, there is still the same grasp of the significant, the impatience at the unessential. Mr. Symons writes criticism in a prose which is lovely to the ear, criticism which in his own words is "a valuation of forces" and which is "indifferent to their direction". He runs the gamut from Leonardo da Vinci to Joseph Conrad. It is all very quiet, almost minor in quality, but he invokes the magic of his subjects by such a major intuition that one cannot easily forget.

It is quite fitting that after his beautiful work on Tolstoy Romain Rolland should write with equal sympathy and appreciation his "Mahatma Gandhi" (Century). Little truth and much myth have come out of India concerning this unquestioned leader of more than three hundred million persons, for the officials in their fear color the man's doctrine of love, and the disciples become too extravagant in their eulogies. Rolland, of course, is in accord with Gandhi. The man who could write "Above the Battle" at the time when he did would have to champion the great Hindu, yet there is dispassionate criticism in this study. The convincing prose of Rolland, utilized to explain a character he loves, gives an exceptional quality to a book on a Messianic figure. It is translated by Catherine D. Groth.

J. C. Squire, editor of "The London Mercury", is one of the few literary critics who combine an intimate facility with sound reasoning into essays invariably entertaining and interesting. "Essays on Poetry" (Doran) is in the typical Squire manner. His knowledge is not served in a heavy pedantic style with which all but scholars must struggle, and his intimacies are not too intimate. The book is valuable for "Mr. Hardy's Old Age" alone, but Housman, Yeats, and Alice Meynell are discussed with as much grace.

W. H. Hudson could never have attained his enviable eminence, had his literary output been limited to "Nature in Downland" (Dutton). Yet this lesser book is at times lifted to the altitude of his compelling charm — charm making one mourn for the lost fortune to have gone a-tramping within earshot of this naturalist — even though in its entirety it falls short of Hudson's heights. There are glimpses of the Midas of his other books — the great alchemist whose words make gold of everything he loves — but the power is not sustained. It requires effort to pronounce the book second rate, for this reviewer is almost silly in his Hudsonian idolatry. But it is second rate for Hudson, which means, however, that it is well up among the best travel books published recently and that it makes most other observers of nature seem astigmatic fellows, wandering without their spectacles. "Downland", by the way, is the chalk cliffed coast of England — the locale of "A Shepherd's Life".

When a man undertakes to write the biography of a poet of an alien race, it is greatly to the credit of both of them. Michael Monahan shows in "Heinrich Heine, His Romance and Tragedy" (Brown) that he not only admires his subject but

that he understands him. It is more difficult however to make his readers either admire or understand, and no matter how loudly Mr. Monahan insists on Heine's wit and charm and lyric qualities, he has not proved his points. Translation of poetry is rarely satisfactory, and the examples given are particularly unfortunate ones, from which the grace and music of the original German have fled, leaving only a mawkish sentimentality. The poem beginning:

The thought of Germany at night
Drives slumber from my pillow quite. . .

will hardly convince anyone that the author is "in his peculiar lyrical province without equal in modern letters". Biographically the account is very sketchy; and in the fervent denial of most of the accusations against Heine's character, methinks Mr. Monahan doth protest too much.

Theodore Dreiser's "The Color of a Great City" (Boni, Liveright) is a realist's picture book of New York in the first and second decades of this century. Sombre in tone and sometimes labored as to style, the thirty eight sketches that comprise the volume form a pattern of despair that belies its title. Of the mad, clashing, ever whirling spectrum of the city there is little here. Pessimism, like the darkened eye of the camera, has silhouetted these figures against a doomsday sky: sandwich men and pushcart pedlers, bums and roustabouts of the waterfront, the now vanished bread line and the old style ward boss, stunted child laborers in the slums and the stiletto-marked amours of Little Italy. In his introductory chapter, Dreiser describes these things as of the very substance of the city he knew in his early adventurings in it. Glimpses of a crumbling substratum of hopelessness that served O. Henry for copy spell out for him the whole riddle of existence — youth stripped of its illusions and old age barren of comfort. But underneath this intent and characteristic preoccupation with the dull, monotonous lives of drab people smolders a desire to lay hold on beauty. And it is this desire, breaking into occasional exquisite flame, that brings his latest book up to and above the level of Dreiser's best work. Things seen before as through a glass darkly are suddenly bathed in light. The aching loveliness of pigeons in flight, the eternal freshness of the universe, the city he dreamed of before he knew its sordidness — "so far-flung, so beautiful, so dead" — even the inscrutable wisdom that moves behind the Bowery Mission: these mark a realist's progress beyond the realms of personal bitterness and the dreary, humorless saga of the underdog.

Princeton in the field again! Here we have Edward Steese of the class of '24 who has written "Storm in Harvest" (Brick Row Bookshop) — a volume of poems. Echoes of thought, tricks of writing show that Mr. Steese has not escaped the influence of Robert Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson. The title poem is a case in evidence. But there is more to these verses than mere imitation. The conception of death as a railroad journey, in "The Last Train", is original and striking. There will be others besides the professors at Princeton to speak enthusiastically of this work.

The sober title of Albert Leon Guérard's "Reflections on the Napoleonic Legend" (Scribner) does not

suggest its wealth of keen, witty philosophy, its stimulating style, its trenchant logic. Whether the reader be an idolizer or a contemner of the Man of Destiny, or merely a collector of Napoleonana, here is a book that cannot be ignored. It is not too much to say, even, that a reader without a French historical background can obtain from it a clearer insight into Napoleon's character, his aims and achievements, than from any number of "fife and drum" histories, or the rather misleading summarization in Wells's "Outline". What makes Mr. Guérard's study of the Napoleonic legend especially vital is his correlation of past and present: his introductory "On Historical Legends in General and Whether Napoleon Ever Existed" is masterly. This is one of those rare books in which wit, erudition, and logic are so delightfully welded that the critic finds no scope for destructive energy. And the very soul of the book is expressed in the author's dedication to his son, for whom it was written, "that he might grow up in respect for truth and contempt for idols". It is a sane, fine work, of real value in a day which shows the Napoleonic ideal triumphant in a stricken Europe.

Credit C. David Stelling of London with an idea. He arranged a series of what he called "lectures and counter-lectures", nine of them. In each, two celebrities with opposing views were inveigled into giving a joint talk on a given topic. G. K. Chesterton and C. A. McCurdy aired their views on "Modern Journalism". Ian Hay and Sinclair Lewis spoke on "High Street and Main Street". H. G. Wells and E. B. Osborn debated the teaching of history. The final event was a sort of intellectual Battle Royal on the proposition "that education is the curse of the country", with Viscountess Astor acting as referee between members of the Oxford and the Cambridge Union Societies. These lectures have been gathered into a book, "Yea and Nay" (Brentano). The volume is amusing rather than elevating; and some of the best fun is provided by those who are not (to the American mind) the "big guns". True, Philip Guedalla and Wells are superb. But the Duke of Northumberland delivered a serious harangue against pacifism that George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly might take over whole. And the university men decorated a ridiculous topic with brilliant flippancy. It would be interesting to know why Sinclair Lewis and Alfred Noyes declined to have their lectures included.

"The Ring of Love" by Brookes More (Cornhill) is a triumph of the publisher's art, with the result that it costs more than it is worth. Poetically, Mr. More is a unique phenomenon in this day and generation: a conscientious but not always fortunate craftsman, loaded down with principles of art — and with nothing to say. In two characteristic essays, he attacks "fashion in art" while advocating "patterns for poets". Much of his own work is too consciously patterned after Tennyson's juvenilia; much is woven of words that are nothing but words into French forms as rare as phœnix feathers and as useless. Occasionally, as in "Silence", Mr. More achieves homiletic dignity; sometimes, as in "A Memory", he hits off a lyric that is lovely enough, and not too intellectual, to be set successfully to music. These poems, at all events, are better than his earlier work; though why he concludes the volume with a

reprint of the jejune, overformal "Lover's Rosary", which is no better today than it was three years ago, must remain one of the things that no fellow can find out.

"My University Days" by Maxim Gorky (Boni, Liveright) is a partial, but copious, record of the author's early hardships. There is in it little of introspective reminiscence; Gorky's recollection is so detailed, his mind so unsentimental and clear, that the story becomes almost purely an objective one, and thereby more powerful. Types definitely Russian and alien to the American public, foreign incidents and strange scenes, are by simple words and bare descriptions made into visible, very nearly tangible objects that must leave their impress on the mind of every reader. One has the feeling that in each instance Gorky had an implacable image of actuality in mind and that he has, by conforming to it absolutely in his writing, given us its replica. There are prolonged crucial times of horror and moments of abandoned beauty that tax even the reader's endurance; but the writer's strength is irreducible. The book is marred by the translation; there is scarcely a page on which the simplest idiomatic uses of the English language have not been distorted and prepositions, adverbs, or tenses misplaced. It takes patience and imagination to surmount this garbled hack work; but the book compels and rewards the exercise.

Another example of Professor J. Arthur Thomson's method in popularizing science in his "What Is Man?" (Putnam). He has assembled from the sciences of anthropology, biology, and psychology the data which are concerned with the history of man, the changes in his physical and cultural make up, his characteristics as an individual and as a member of a group, and so on. Thus the lay reader not interested in these sciences may be drawn to them by his interest in himself, and then find the bibliography at the end almost irresistible.

All things red are works of the devil when seen by Cécile Tormay. The second volume of this writer's experiences in Hungary during the Bela Kun revolution is as vindictive as the first. "An Outlaw's Diary" (McBride) may be great stuff for one hundred per centers of any land, but it is poor, prejudiced, and, we wager, unreliable history. The second volume is a story of "The Commune".

Uncertainty of purpose is not generally regarded as an asset in poetry. And hesitancy of thought and execution continually mars "Scarlet Runner" (Crowell), a book of verse by Elizabeth Shaw Montgomery. Yet occasionally Mrs. Montgomery can express her feeling of uncertainty vividly enough. The book would be far better if there were more verses like the ones called "Cathedral".

It ill behooves a cynical critic to come out of his melancholy reveries to give unstinted praise to any book. That's considered exceedingly bad form. But a good book, current opinion to the contrary, is as great a delight to the reviewer as to the person who pays for his copy. "In the Footsteps of the Lincolns" by Ida M. Tarbell (Harper) is carefully planned, well written, and possesses a charm that the most blasé reader cannot deny. As a fitting prelude to the romance of Abraham Lincoln, the president, it tells the simple story of the

great man's ancestors. Miss Tarbell knows her subject thoroughly (there is evidence of a vast amount of research), and what is far more important, knows how to present the subject in a highly interesting manner. The olive wreath must go to her for the most entertainingly straightforward narrative that has appeared in a long time.

The Doran "Modern Readers' Bookshelf" is destined for the appeasing of that eagerness for knowledge which is one of the "chief characteristics of our time". Its subjects range from biology to art, from history to religion. One volume of the series is John Drinkwater's "Victorian Poetry". This is a technical discussion of verse with the subject divided into two parts, the first on the diction of the period and the second on the material. The first portion is particularly noteworthy — it is a keen critical analysis of the stuff that poetry is made of, and word values are weighed with delicacy and precision that betray the craftsman. All of it is written simply and colloquially to interest the casual reader as well as the professional writer, and there are passages of insight and appreciation such as only a poet could write.

Radical candor runs through "On Strange Altars; A Book of Enthusiasms" (A. and C. Boni) by Paul Jordan-Smith. Unfortunately there is, too, the air of martyrdom, with which some radicals—especially the young—stand and bark at the pack. "I know you won't like these literary criticisms because they are unorthodox", one almost hears, "but here they are, anyhow." The book is sometimes sophomoric, sometimes marked by overemphasis (which two characteristics may be the same thing), but it is always entertaining if not taken too seriously.

By the somewhat unusual method of combining sentences used by the late president on various occasions, Hamilton Foley offers in "Woodrow Wilson's Case for the League of Nations" (Princeton) a volume of considerable significance in the field of diplomatic and war history. The compilation, which had the approval of Mr. Wilson, was made from the stenographic minutes of the detailed explanation—to the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate—of the League of Nations Covenant and the Treaty of Versailles, and from the official record of the thirty seven addresses delivered during the tour of the Western States when the treaty was before the Senate in 1919. To the four chapters of this material are appended in full the Covenant and the two addresses before the Peace Conference at Paris. The whole forms a careful consideration of the main aspects of the subject in Mr. Wilson's own words and does not suffer in any sense from the novel manner of presentation.

Beauty springing from the immediate environment of the author is seldom absent from "Bars and Shadows: The Prison Poems of Ralph Chaplin" (Nellie S. Nearing). In "Taps", "Shadows", "Phantoms", "Seven Little Sparrows", and "Song of Last Things", among numerous others, there are longing and loneliness finely expressed by a young man who was serving a sentence of twenty years for violation of the espionage act when they were written. (He was released last Christmas.) Inspiration almost deserts Chaplin in "Salaam", a bitter piece with a political background, and is also less manifest in other bits of a pur-

poseful nature, such as "To Eugene Victor Debs", and "To France". The long sociological introduction by Scott Nearing contains the surprising quotation from Chaplin, "Above all things I don't want anyone to try to make me out a 'poet' — because I'm not." And yet, rebel or no rebel against the political order, he undoubtedly also sings. The repeated reprinting of his poems may convince him in time.

The second volume of "Wonders of the Past", edited by J. A. Hammerton (Putnam), maintains fully the high standard set by the first member of the series. Here again the text is comparatively sketchy, and in places inadequate, but its shortcomings are magnificently atoned for by the beauty, the variety, and the artistry of the abundant illustrations. The second volume, like the first, is confined almost exclusively to the ancient world, and introduces us to the pyramids of Egypt, the shrines of Sicily, the tombs of Babylon, the sculpture of the Athenians, the monuments of the Mayas, the "Lost Cities" of Ceylon, and the splendors of Imperial Rome and of many another Imperial City of antiquity.

In his "Changes and Chances" (Harcourt, Brace), thanks to the employment of such courageously idealistic publications as the London "Nation", the "Daily Chronicle", and the "Manchester Guardian", Henry W. Nevinson, the author of a score or more of books, most of them purporting to be nought but journalism, gives us that *clarification* we get — infrequently — when journalism has gone beyond its legitimate top reach, has arisen into literature. Civilization's tortuous childhood and schooldays, the acquisition of that almost curious thing, "a glimmering of reason", flashes of fellow souls rising through conflict into light, of Lionel Johnson, Edward Thomas, Olive Schreiner, Kropotkin, Yeats, Hardy, Shaw, John O'Leary, Maud Gonne, Sarah Bernhardt, Samuel Butler, Ruskin, A. E., and of many others who have tilled diligently the fields of themselves and their world toward the good, if sometimes uncertain, harvest. . . This autobiography exemplifies an almost Shelley-like ideal of gentle, steadfast devotion to supreme actualites at whatever their foggy cost. Officially Mr. Nevinson has been designated "a man of very violent opinions". He here offers his quiet sort of comment on the Boer War (among other blots on his native 'scutcheon), on our own Spanish-American fracas, on the black-and-tanning of six-centuries-enslaved Ireland, and, in general, on what "violence" has been officially defined as: "not seeing eye to eye with the man in the street".

Humorists, at best, have a questionable batting average, so one should not complain if a fair level of amusing quality does not characterize every page of a humorist's book. Which means that there are many pages in "At a Venture" (Harper) by Charles A. Bennett which do not provoke one's risibles, but that now and then there is a loud guffaw and now and then a smile tucked away in the book. Clarence Day, Jr., has endeavored to brighten up the desert stretches with twenty oasical drawings.

A great poet is one who survives despite the books written about him. The mysterious Browning has withstood almost half a century of biography, essay, and criticism. Another attempt has been made to explain his philosophy in "Robert Browning, Poet

and Philosopher" by Frances M. Sim (Appleton). The author tries hard, there are indications of much loving labor, but —. Here is about as chronological an effort as one could wish; it classifies, explains, interprets. Yet in the end we are just where we started: Browning's is a great, mysterious, unfathomable spirit which is far above arithmetical analysis. The book should appeal to hero worshipers, but will add little to their understanding of the poet.

Two useful reference books are the "Index to Short Stories" compiled by Ina Ten Eyck Firkins and the "Standard Catalog: Fiction Section" compiled by Corinne Bacon (H. W. Wilson Co.). Miss Firkins's index contains 17,288 stories, representing 808 authors and twenty five languages. For each story there is ample reference to books and magazines in which it has appeared. The "Fiction Catalog" lists 2,350 of the best novels and short story collections for public library use. Of these, some 750 titles have been starred for the consideration of the small library. As a further aid to the librarian the compiler has appended to almost every book a descriptive or critical summary of its contents.

There is a varied assortment of prose, poetry, speeches, history, in "A Book of Canadian Prose and Verse" compiled and edited by Edmund Kemper Broadus and Eleanor Hammond Broadus (Macmillan Company of Canada). Its particular significance and interest lie in the fact that it reflects Canada from the standpoint of her writers and speech makers. It would seem, however, that authors and poets could do far better by so great a country as Canada than has already been evidenced.

Whoever conceived the idea of gathering together the critical papers which appear under the title "Criticism in America" (Harcourt, Brace) has done a great service. For here is a group of essays which it has been next to impossible to secure for several years—and they do illustrate the American critical attitude with rare completeness. This series, arranged chronologically, ranges in date from 1910 to 1923, and in name from J. E. Spingarn to Ernest Boyd. It is amazing to discover a somewhat uniform viewpoint, varying violently in expression. The clearest essays in the volume, we should say, are those by Messrs. Spingarn, Sherman, and Brooks; the dullest, those by T. S. Eliot; the noisiest, those by H. L. Mencken; and the most scholarly, those by George Edward Woodberry and W. C. Brownell. It occurs to us that much muddy thinking on the part of book reviewers, and those who choose to chatter about modern tendencies in this and that branch of literature, could be eliminated by a careful perusal of this excellent volume.

Dhan Gopal Mukerji, author of "Jungle Beasts and Men" (Dutton), set forth on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas. He was just fifteen, and the journey was a very real part of his education. He learned what life in a little village on the edge of the jungle may mean when a hungry tiger follows the herds home, or when a cholera epidemic "walks like a net of silence" among the people. He met magicians, river pirates, and nobles of the old warrior class, all with fascinating tales to tell. He has recorded his adventures in a clear, simple, rhythmic English from which the surprising escapades stand out in startling relief.