IN BRIEF REVIEW

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN is a hardy perennial whose bloom this year has been called "Materia Critica" (Knopf). It is a continuation of his erudite comment on things theatrical, containing, as always, themes for debate as well as discourse for applause. It is quite likely that he has given before his idea of what constitutes a good critic, but his 1924 pattern is: "One is a good critic in the degree that one is able to answer vacillating and quibbling doubt with determined and persuasively positive doubt." His endeavor, of course, is to get within his own definition.

If the familiar phrase, the "triumph of mind over matter", can be held to mean anything, surely it is most applicable to the life of the "wizard" Steinmetz — who entered America with difficulty, penniless, speaking but a few words of English, deformed and handicapped in everything except the power of his mind, and who rose to international fame as a scientist and inventor within three years from that inauspicious beginning. Few lives are more worthy of a lasting record. J. W. Hammond has admirably performed the task of providing a popular biography. His "Charles Proteus Steinmetz" (Century) is based upon data given him by Steinmetz himself; it is a fully authorized life, sufficiently complete for the lay reader. It treats rather briefly of the technical scientific matters involved, but it gives a vivid and adequate picture of the man as a human being: a singularly winsome, amiable personality always immensely alive, of widely varying interests and of indefatigable energy. It shows him at play, in his "camp" and with his adopted grandchildren. It also gives glimpses of his whimsical humor, of his many pets and his hobbies. His political and socialist idealistic interests are also covered. The book is highly readable.

Cats, looking upon queens, at least can never tell what they know, but how the spectres of departed monarchs must shudder at the revelation that biographers, looking upon kings, can report the best and worst. Here come further defamations heaped upon the reputation of poor old Louis XV — stories translated by H. S. Mingard from the annotations of Mouffle d'Angerville, later edited by Albert Meyrac. The record of indiscretions is called "The Private Life of Louis XV" (Boni, Liveright). "New and unexpected aspects of the king and his court", says the jacket. New, perhaps, but hardly unexpected by anyone who has heard of the bacchanalian reign. Two things survive from that epoch in France — furniture and records of debauchery. This volume has little to do with furniture, except that of the boudoir. It is entertainingly written, and while a magistrate might protest against its being in his daughter's library, it has the excellent excuse of being history.

In these days of vicarious wayfaring, one is particularly grateful to Gordon S. Maxwell for "The Authors' Thames" (Brentano). This literary ramble through the Thames Valley, from the outskirts of London up as

far as Windsor, is something quite unique. The book is the first to deal with the literary heritage of this section, and we find it easy to agree with the author when he says: "Search as you will in the shires of England, delve where you please in Bookland, and you will fail to discover any district of equal size even one half as rich in association with English Literature as that part of the Thames Valley lying between London and Windsor." The very fact that this country is so "rich in association" accounts no doubt for the encyclopædic and Baedeker-like quality of the volume. Mr. Maxwell has, however, handled a vast amount of material in a graceful manner, and the charming sketches of Lucilla S. Maxwell which illumine the text help to produce the illusion that one is on English soil. From the opening page the years glide gently backward and the reader finds himself in the alluring company of Pope, Swift, Gray, Sheridan, Pepys, Fanny Burney, Dickens, Blackmore, Milton, Scott, and Thackeray.

For the novice who looks upon his craft with the humility of an artist—if there be any such—the editor of "The Midland" has written "A Handbook of Short Story Writing" (Knopf). It is informal, yet it contains a deal of suggestive counsel that is meaty, wise, and sometimes delicately ironical. If any proof were needed, this little book would account for the high fiction standard that is characteristic of John T. Frederick's magazine. In the book's very brevity and modesty lies its strength. The author is too sincere a teacher and too good a critic of that amorphous mass of manuscript that drifts from one editor's desk to another's to suppose that any book or series of lectures can "teach" the art, or the business even, of writing fiction. Recognizing the futility of most of the elaborate plans and creaking devices set forth by those who would train young writers to see life steadily and whole, he has reduced his advice to simple terms of note taking and a logical distribution of emphasis. An enthusiastic admirer of the genre study himself, he urges his students to lift their materials from the magic fibre of life itself. Certainly this type of fiction is the most native and earth breathing product we have, especially in the short narrative, and his handbook should stir in its readers an increased respect for the form. There is no doubt that it will also arouse in those who study it seriously a new regard for the materials of an honorable craft.

"Benjamin Franklin, Printer" by John Clyde Oswald (Doubleday, Page) is not so thorough a record as a lover of printing might wish for, yet this facet of that manysided man is enjoyably described. The format is contemporary, and the many reproductions of title and other pages set by Poor Richard are also relishable. Published for the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, this book should claim the attention of devotees of the bookmaking art as well as of those engaged in advertising. Many will find solace in discovering that Franklin could make a typographical error (see page 80) and yet remain famous.

The second volume of Sir William Orpen's "Outline of Art" (Putnam) shows little, if any, improvement over its predecessor. It is ordinary. It should, however, have a popular appeal; there are over three hundred reproductions of familiar paintings, and

the text is sufficiently simple — and uninspiring — to please the conventional mind. It is a pity that a man with Orpen's pictorial talents should be unequal to an enlightening treatise on his art. It is a greater misfortune that the monetary reward of such a childish opus is assured, indicating, as it does, the monumental credulity and obviousness of the American mind.

There comes from Dutton a new edition — and a cheaper one, *laus Deo* — of "Far Away and Long Ago" by W. H. Hudson. Not that the format, as we professionals love to call it, matters with this book. Under the enchantment of a distant land, strange birds, and level plains shimmering in the light of a golden sun, such incidents as print and binding fade from the eager mind. A leisurely narrative of the active and intelligent life of an imaginative child, this autobiography of the early years of Hudson's life is told in such clean and carven prose as fills with delight the heart of the weary reviewer.

A few years ago it would have required much courage for any writer to adopt an attitude of criticism toward democracy, or to question its adequacy as an ideal for the management of human affairs. B. Kingsley Martin, however, boldly opens his careful study of the Crimean war and Lord Palmerston with the remark that "Of all the unexamined assumptions of democracy none seems so strange today as the belief that public opinion is a reliable guide for a political society". The gist of "The Triumph of Lord Palmerston" (Dial) is a demonstration of the fallaciousness of that assumption. It is primarily a study in the genesis and quality of popular opinion: specifically, an analysis of "the development of English public opinion on foreign affairs in the years preceding the Crimean war". Mr. Martin finds it, in the main, illogical, without much foundation in fact, largely a product of the newspapers and of unthinking following of catchwords and traditional notions. The result was what Disraeli aptly called a "just but unnecessary war". Mr. Martin's examination of the complex elements of this total of public opinion is acutely penetrating: it is, to some extent, breaking a new path for the historian. The book is very carefully documented and is readably fluent.

You will hardly believe it until you see it, but here in one compact volume are all the essayists, poets, letter writers, novelists, and popular scientists of English literature. The volume is "The Modern Student's Book of English Literature" (Scribner). It is edited by three professors: Ayres of Columbia, Howe of Indiana, and Padelford of Washington. Assuming — and sometimes one hates to — that there are well over half a million words in our language worth reading, the anthologizers have gleaned well. From "Widsith" to Galsworthy, from "Beowulf" to Francis Brett Young, they have omitted almost nothing. Indeed, collaboration with the thin-paper makers has enabled them to represent each author with considerable bulk.

It is too bad that C. H. Charles could not have given a better title to his "Love Letters of Great Men and Women" (Brentano). The name is apt enough, for that is just what the book contains, but it sounds too much like the blatant advertisements of the instalment plan houses with their suggestive illustrations. As a collection of important literary documents, the

book is worthwhile. Charles has borrowed from numerous works previously published, but that does not matter, for his purpose is to give a broad picture of love inspired missives from Pope to the twentieth century. It is questionable whether the compiler's comments add much to the worth of the volume, for the letters really speak better for themselves than he does.

The fourth volume of "Wonders of the Past", edited by J. A. Hammerton (Putnam), is a fitting conclusion to the series. It deals with all the ancient splendors and ruins not described in the previous three volumes, and contains interesting and instructive chapters on the cliff dwellings of America, the catacombs of old Rome, the rock carvings of prehistoric Britain and Brittany, the sculpture and masonry of the Empire of the Hittites, the theatres of Greece, the temples of Jerusalem, and the ship builders of Egypt and of Tyre. The profuse illustrations maintain the high standard set by the previous members of the series, and the text, while scanty, is exceedingly readable and conveys much valuable information.

In "Robert Smith Surtees" (Scribner), by Himself and E. D. Cuming, we have a lifelike portrait of a singularly upright and memorable early Victorian whose achievement as a man of letters was somewhat dimmed by that of his greater contemporaries. The reminiscent chapters, by Surtees himself, suggest in strong outline the completed picture of the man with which his biographer, E. D. Cuming, fills two thirds of the volume. It is an impartial tribute to the creator of "Jorrocks", to the man who wrote the first and best satirical novels of the English landed gentry of his day.

It is Edwin E. Slosson who does for science in this country what J. Arthur Thomson does in England — with this difference, that Dr. Slosson takes his lay readers into all the departments of science. He includes physics, chemistry, astronomy, and other pure sciences besides biology, together with their applications. Thus the short papers collected in "Keeping Up with Science" (Harcourt, Brace), some from the pens of the staff of Science Service, deal with recent discoveries about hormones, dreams, the weather, insulin, white coal, the heat of a star, visible sound, a mercury engine, de-inking newspaper, concrete in building, and so on. Not the least valuable part of Dr. Slosson's work, however, is his emphasis throughout upon the method and spirit of science.

Books of the type of "Isles of Eden" by Laura Lee Davidson (Minton, Balch), to be good at all, must be very good indeed. This volume has much in its favor, but it just falls short of what we hoped it might be. In diary form Miss Davidson faithfully recounts a summer's experiences close to nature in a wild portion of Canada, giving an accurate picture and one not lacking in detail. Yet there is a great gap between appreciation of nature and the ability to get it onto a printed page, without letting the stars grow dim and the woods lose something of their tang. With an observant eye and a fine feeling for the world of outdoors, Miss Davidson has filled her book with interesting material, but she verges upon sentimentality and tends to employ trite and hackneyed phraseology as occasion permits. Try as we will we cannot lose ourselves in "Isles of Eden"; that printed page simply does not seem to change into "a canoe and the shadow of a rock".

Lincoln's fame as an orator, so far as it results from general knowledge rather than reputation, rests on his Gettysburg address and the peroration of his Second Inaugural address. What his other speeches are like, and what effect they produced, may be learned from "Abraham Lincoln, Master of Words" (Appleton) by Daniel Kilham Dodge. Here are included not only selections from formal addresses but from messages, proclamations, and telegrams. Professor Dodge is a college teacher with Lincoln as a hobby — and he writes like a professor with a hobby. The result is at times a bit didactic but the matter is of itself interesting and the presentation is clear. One enjoys knowing Lincoln through these pages.

The keen delight which accompanied the reading of the third volume of "The Farington Diary" (Doran) arose from the sense of liberty it gave, in a vicarious manner, to our inhibited dilettantism. For whole evenings, with Farington, one can strut among such personages as Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Siddons, and William Pitt. And in a decidedly familiar manner one can talk to and about these people. If one should care for a bit of gossip with the caviar, there is this:

> Capt. Thomas called. He spoke of the reports of Mrs. Siddons being gone off with a young man, an artist, who had courted two of her daughters in succession.

And, on the other hand, we find such personal pictures of Dr. Samuel Johnson as this:

> When Dr. Johnson first commenced a habit of going to Sir Joshua's he went so often that it was evident Sir Joshua felt oppressed by it. . . . He would sometimes come in the room in which Dr. Johnson was sitting with Miss Reynolds and taking up his hat would walk away without much regarding Johnson.

But Samuel was his old redoubtable self:

> He did not discontinue his visits but said he did not mind Sir Joshua's manner, being certain that in time he should make an impression that would do that away: thus depending upon the operation of his superior understanding and knowledge.

The Diary causes one to wonder when the artist found time for his painting or the teaching he did. But the precise fact remains that this alone is an artistic legacy which Farington has left; and it is one of the most delightful and spicy records of humanity since Samuel Pepys's book.

"Under Dispute" by Agnes Repplier (Houghton Mifflin) confirms, by another telling thrust, the author's rather quaintly martial reputation as the wielder of a keen bladed, finely tempered, rapier-like pen. In addition, it displays a slightly more sympathetic tolerance than Miss Repplier has hitherto found consonant with her inexorable standard of Bostonian good taste. Her defense of Becky Sharp and Jane Austen's Emma is peculiarly delightful and in sharp contrast to the political extravagances that, with their untutored emotionalism, grossly mar the temper of the book. Such fervor is not noble; and it is disconcertingly foreign to the perspicacious moderation in which Miss Repplier excels — when she remains in her rightful, somewhat academic province of literature.

"Like Saturn, music smilingly devours her children." This is the text upon which Milo E. Benedict, in "What Music Does to Us" (Small, Maynard), preaches a sermon full of bitter warning. We are threatened, he says, with being swallowed whole by an "all-music culture (nothing-to-live-by-or-for-except-music)" which dissi-

pates ambition, drugs the intellect, and unfits the victim for real life. . . . This "methodless" essay swarms with half truths; even the author himself acknowledges that America has never been swamped by too much devotion to art and that Europe is now escaping from the over specialization which ruled when he was a student of Liszt's.

Modern press agents have done wonders in educating an eagerly credulous public to a point where it secretly delights in the discreet indiscretions of female (how delightfully evasive was Fenimore Cooper; today there are ladies — and women) celebrities. What a poor second our publicity man runs to the outraged historian who, for centuries, has conscientiously described the "unspeakable" orgies of Cleopatra's time. We venture that Cleopatra, in a straw vote, would be acclaimed the world's most beautiful and wicked woman. Of such is the power of the press. Yet, just when these unwitting press agents had established for her a fairly good reputation (the words are used advisedly in the light of modern acceptation), along comes Arthur Weigall and tells us in "The Life and Times of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt" (Putnam) that it's all a matter of viewpoint, and that according to ancient standards of righteousness the Queen of the Nile was a comparatively moral woman. Sentimentally speaking, Mr. Weigall has tooted the trumpet of reality, awakened us from our pleasant dream, and lo! one of our most cherished fancies vanishes. His sympathetic treatment effectually eradicates the fantasmal creature of our fancy and creates an attractive, intelligent human being who was the victim of particularly distressing circumstances. It is a first rate book. Mr. Weigall writes lucidly, has a keen sense of the dramatic in history, yet is never lugubriously historical.

The problem of the abnormal child mind is one on which all too little light has been thrown. In the preface to "The Psychology of the Unadjusted School Child" (Macmillan), Dr. John J. B. Morgan ascribes the deplorable lack of knowledge on the part of the ordinary teacher and the ordinary parent to the fact that most of the literature on the subject is so technical as to be beyond the comprehension of the layman. And so in his book he has set out to simplify the subject for the parents and the teachers. He does not altogether succeed. Indeed, more than once he falls into the very pitfall of over technicality that he is seeking to avoid. But he has done a fine thing, and if only by virtue of the many illuminating examples of abnormal cases with which he has been wise enough to sprinkle his work, he has let much daylight in on the often tragic darkness of the "different" child's needs.

The object of "Persistent Questions in Public Discussion" (Century) is to provide stimulating material on problems with which we are constantly confronted. Its chief, and rather unique, merit is that it fulfils this aim. The essays included have been admirably chosen and represent a liberal viewpoint. By avoiding both the rabidness of uninformed radicalism and the speciousness of stolid reactionaries, the considerations presented actually furnish one with starting points for thought along the line indicated. Racial problems, war and peace, international relations, education, and religion are a few of the topics treated. Appendices include a bibliography of similar works, questions and topics for discussion, and reading lists. While ex-

cellent for individual reading, the volume is especially suitable for clubs, literary and debating societies. Within our knowledge, it is one of the best books of its kind.

Bits of gossip, anecdotes, and accidents comprise "Uncensored Recollections" (Lippincott), a volume by no means so racy as its title might imply. It is not, however, uninteresting. But when one hopes for the nobility *sans culotte* one is a trifle disappointed to find it *en chemise*. Perhaps one should not relish these somewhat unvarnished stories of queens and duchesses, emperors and dukes — but one does. There is a keen pleasure in seeing the great Victorians in their unguarded moments. One feels that this sort of thing hits nearer home than the customary biography. The collection of memories offered is large. Queen Victoria, the Empress Eugénie, "Plon Plon", Lord Randolph Churchill, the Vanderbilts, and the Duke of Edinburgh are but a few of the personages about whom tales are told. Some of these recitals are humorous, some funny, others flat. But as a whole this anonymous volume will amuse and entertain all those who have any interest in the personages of the Victorian era.

"The London of Charles Dickens" (Doran), a companion volume to E. Beresford Chancellor's "The London of Thackeray" of a year or so ago, is comparatively important at a time when there are appearing many books dealing with the scenes of Dickens's novels. That the subject is not absolutely overdone is evident from the spectacle presented by American tourists in London, standing agape before the reputed "Old Curiosity Shop" in Portsmouth Street, despite the fact that Dickensian authorities have repeatedly pointed out that the edifice in question was never associated with Little Nell and her grandfather. The reason why Dickens's topographical expositions have taken such a hold is that in nearly every case an outstanding figure is associated with them. Goswell Street and Mr. Pickwick are almost synonymous terms; and the Marshalsea is always connected with Little Dorrit.

Hilaire Belloc has his own ideas on writing history, of which "Marie Antoinette"(Putnam) is to be taken as an example — an attempt "to tell history as a story, bringing to truth the arts common to fiction in such a fashion that the reader shall see things passing before his eyes". Marie appears, then, as the chief character in a tragedy, driven by the convergence of accidents, "with a precision that was more than human, right to her predestined end". Not that Mr. Belloc is a Dumas. There are indications, despite the lack of footnotes, that in addition to being drama the volume is history, that besides possessing literary effectiveness to an extraordinary degree, it is based on exhaustive examination of sources.

When the secret convention of the Communist party at Bridgman, Michigan, was raided some two years ago, a number of documents were seized. These papers form the basis of "Reds in America", compiled by R. M. Whitney and published by the Beckwith Press. They reveal the Communist party as the American arm of the Third International, an illegal body which perforce works "underground". As far as possible it carries out its program through legal organizations, some of which it interpenetrates, others of which, like the Workers' party, it sets up as legal

fronts. At the time of the raid the party was badly disorganized through internal strife; its membership was largely foreign born and unnaturalized; its program, mainly theoretical, was worked out in certain "theses" defining the relation of the various Communist groups to those it hoped to influence; membership in the secret Communist party imposed a rigid discipline (including considerable hocus-pocus of secret names for members and organizations) which was obviously unenforced. So much for what the seized papers show. Those reading between the lines may see how pitiful a thing a party may become when it is deprived of legal existence and degenerates into a group of plotters. As a conspiracy, American Communism is singularly uninspiring. However, what Mr. Whitney reads between the lines is something else. He devotes most of his book to various liberal and radical manifestations and implies that they are the work of tools and dupes of the Communists. His idea sounds the more reasonable because his writing is so much more interesting than the quoted documents — documents which reveal the Communist party as anything but the menace he proclaims it to be.

The Knights of Columbus are issuing a series of volumes telling the contributions of various races to our country. They are fortunate in securing Dr. William E. B. DuBois to write on "The Gift of Black Folk" (Stratford). Dr. DuBois is a bit chary in his praise of the younger generation among his people, and he has told the story of the Negro so often that his interest in history seems perfunctory, but he has the gift of style and of polemic. He pays a special tribute to Negro women and relates the achievement of his people in exploration, martial service, labor, literature, music, and science, with special emphasis upon the spiritual gifts of his group with their perpetual challenge to American democracy.

To the American reader of "Essays and Adventures of a Labour M. P. ", by Josiah C. Wedgwood (Huebsch), the most interesting pages are those dealing with the author's experiences in the Boer War, in Flanders with "The First 100,000", and at Gallipoli where he was wounded and won the D. S. O. These "Adventures" have a vivid and worldwide appeal which makes one wish that Colonel Wedgwood had included more of them in this volume and less of such strictly British political and economic subjects as "Land Values", "Indian Home Rule", and "Native Lands and Crown Colonies".

"George MacDonald and his Wife", by their son Greville MacDonald (Dial), is a book that will afford considerable interest to the student of English literature, and much spiritual help to anyone who has poverty or ill health to fight against. It narrates the daily life of one who met troubles bravely and helped others to do likewise. MacDonald was a writer of novels, a poet, a lecturer and public reader, a preacher. And in all his work he tried to bring God nearer man. Some of his ideas on religion were considered in his day unorthodox. Today he would be considered conservative. It is generally conceded that MacDonald was not a very great man as a poet or novelist. But that he was a very saintly man no one will doubt who reads this book.