RECENT BOOKS IN BRIEF REVIEW

IT is a pleasure to find Nathaniel Wright Stephenson's account of "Lincoln" (Bobbs-Merrill) among the many wearisome repetitions which pass as new interpretations. This is more than a record of Lincoln as he stands in history. It is a thoughtful consideration of the almost subconscious causes that made him what he was: the mysticism of a forest people, a highly religious and emotional strain inherited from his mother, a recurrent lack of confidence from a vagrant father. This study endeavors to show the inner Lincoln, the thinker with his inherent sadness and sympathy, becoming fused with the outward, affectionate, story telling Lincoln visible to most people, and resulting at last in the Lincoln of the war. As Mr. Stephenson says, "All stories have been told, it is the telling of them that matters." And this of his is outstanding in beauty, depth of feeling, and sustaining interest.

A new edition has been brought out of "Ireland's Literary Renaissance" (Knopf), the work of one of the most intelligent critics now writing in America, Ernest Boyd. His purpose is "to give an account of the literature produced in Ireland during the last thirty years under the impulse of the Celtic Renaissance" which followed the political events of 1848; and the book contains chapters on the precursors of the movement, its sources, the transition, the revival, Yeats, the poets, the Dublin mystics, the dramatists, and the writers of fiction and narrative prose. In his preface Mr. Boyd objects to the custom of fitting Irish writers into the English literary movement. He, on the contrary, has studied them as part of their national literature and estimated them accordingly.

The short "Autobiography of Countess Tolstoy" (Huebsch), which was to have supplied the other face of the unhappy domestic story told by Tolstoy's autobiography and his letters, is by itself rather unrevealing; it seems but another memorandum in the controversy over their private situation. It is not the chatty sort of memoir now to be had from the wives of important persons; it is only meagrely a memoir. Its truthfulness, so far as it goes, is sincerely and sadly set down; but a censorship has seemingly been exercised over actualities. The things chosen for telling seem colorless and palely told; with something of a trite effect they show the Countess as the devoted wife, the devoted mother (of thirteen children), the devoted adorer of her husband, the laborious copyist of his manuscript, the painstaking manager of his estate. They do not show, except as the reader infers it, the other side of her devotion — the hysteria, the jealousy over those ideas which apparently she did not comprehend but which she could not endure that her husband should share with others and not with her. It is natural that this reverse side should not be in high relief; but also it is not unreasonable that in the face there should be some attempt at distinct expression of personality. This aim, however, does not seem greatly furthered; the tale too much requires a context, part of which, it is true, is

supplied by the preface, and notes and citations by the translators.

A scholarly and thorough piece of work is done by Lewis Mumford in "The Story of Utopias" (Boni, Liveright). Believing that the development of man's ideals of existence is a signpost to his more material changes, he traces the various Utopian schemes that thinkers have evolved from Plato and Sir Thomas More down to W. H. Hudson and H. G. Wells. The first part of the book is concerned with the theories themselves, the last part with an analysis and a very capable criticism of their faults, as well as some interesting constructive suggestions. Mr. Mumford makes the book surprisingly concrete for so abstract a subject, and the scope of his material gives it a social as well as literary significance.

One quality of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's thinking is its independence; and this freshness of outlook compensates for his traveling over such worn paths as Byron, Shelley, Milton, Chaucer, et al. Moreover, "Studies in Literature — Second Series" (Putnam), being as usual a series of lectures, is written in easy conversational style which does not on that account depart from the standards of written prose.

In one way "Human Nature in the Bible" by William Lyon Phelps (Scribner) differs from all the previous commentaries of this much commentaried book. It gives a twentieth century twist to the book of the ages by retelling scriptural tales and rediscussing scriptural themes from the human — not the divine — viewpoint. Every incident has its interpretation, its parallel in modern American life: Saul is called a cowboy, Abraham a Palestinian Roosevelt, Elijah an evangelist, and Joab a professional fighting-hack. The lucid literary style of the Yale professor is varied with a racy Yankee idiom that suits well the simple moralizing and homely philosophy of this, the book of all time arranged for our own day and generation.

The poems in Miss Widdemer's little book, "A Tree with a Bird in it" (Harcourt, Brace), are not all new to the poetry loving public, for many of the parodies that make up this "symposium of contemporary American poets on being shown a pear-tree on which sat a grackle" appeared in either THE BOOKMAN or "The Literary Review". Yet here for the first time they are brought together, and it is impressive to note what an array of poets we have whose work and personalities are sufficiently famous to be parodied. There is much skill and cleverness, deep familiarity with our best, and a kindly, keen sense of satire in this fun making book. Here one meets Lindsay singing a rhythmic marching song full of pulsating excitement, Witter Bynner delivering a "short barytone monologue on Chinese architecture", Richard Le Gallienne piping up to a ballade, Edwin Markham declaiming hurried heroics; and one feels, in short, as though one were attending the Hallowe'en frolic of the Poetry Society of America.

"The Wandering Years" by Katharine Tynan (Houghton Mifflin) is a rambling and talky piece of autobiography. Despite the charm of the writer it becomes very stiff going at times. This eminent Irishwoman is of all people the one to give us something tangible about the Irish character and situation, but she merely

skirts about it in a vague and snatchy discussion. There are fragmentary bits describing her visits to various of the great houses of England and Scotland as well as those of her own country. Many famous names appear on her list of acquaintances, but we know no more about them when we are through than we did when we began. The only real thing in all these pages is a fine showing of the English as well as the Irish soldier.

Given a remote bearing upon a stated problem, any book, in the hands of a skilful prestidigitator, can be made to answer as a medium for the airing of ideas. Our old friend Robinson Crusoe is the goat this time. From an interesting, pottering duffer trying his city bred ingenuity against the wiles of a perverse nature, he has become a social engineer with a philosophy anent the betterment of the poor working girl, the factory drudge, the dead community, etc. Witness "Robinson Crusoe, Social Engineer" by Henry E. Jackson (Dutton). Just why Mr. Jackson, whose head is apparently full of excellent ideas, should resort to the inane trick of passing the buck to Defoe, is beyond our ken. As long as Robinson and Friday are off somewhere fishing, the book is literally packed with a very forceful philosophy concerning the uplift of man, particularly as regards community betterment. But when the marooned city chap and his faithful black appear in the offing, the effect is distressingly inept. Mr. Jackson is so evidently sincere in his intention to correlate Defoe and modern sociological advancement, that one must take his book seriously. But it would have been much better to leave Robinson to the tender mercies of his island, and to talk straight from the shoulder instead of practising philosophical ventriloquism.

The late Thomas Nelson Page discovered that superlatives were feeble things when he tried to express with them the tenderness, the vision, and the sublimity of Dante Alighieri. In "Dante and his Influence" (Scribner) he has gathered together his lectures given at the University of Virginia on the Page-Barbour Foundation. No Italian could exceed in appreciation this estimate of the great "Poet, Seer, and Educator" whose influence Mr. Page traces through his own age and all other ages that have followed, since he was "the inspirer of the great body of poetry of the last six hundred years throughout the world", as well as one of the chief unifying forces of Italy. Those who love the great Florentine will be glad to find in this book an enthusiasm supported by scholarly research; those who do not yet love him will learn to do so.

When our professors turn litterateurs — as they appear to be doing in astounding numbers — they cling to the synthetic method of presenting their subjects, and the result is hardly stimulating. Hence, "An Introduction to Economic History" (Harper) by N. S. B. Gras, professor of economic history at the University of Minnesota, while covering thoroughly and tersely — too tersely — the five fundamental stages of economic development, remains merely a combination of species into genera. As such, it is of undoubted value to the college student, but will not appeal to the average human — to whom it is recommended by the publishers — who desires an insight into economic processes. Van Loon might have made of it a thrilling pageant of interest to all.

A splendid mind and a fine physique seldom are found together. David Lloyd George, mentally a figure of international proportions, is a demigod to the fourth button of his waistcoat but performs a rapid diminuendo from that point to the ground. E. T. Raymond, in his "Lloyd George" (Doran), has painted a brilliant portrait of one of the outstanding figures of modern times. It is a searching analysis, leaving little to the imagination and presenting the facts with such frankness and sincerity that one is left quite free to draw his conclusions and make his own estimate of this good humored, adroit, eloquent, self-confident politician — this politician who proved so resourceful, who possessed such vitality and such remarkable powers of intuition that he became the one man who could lead his country in the crisis of the late war.

It is a newspaper rule of self-defense to season its voluminous Sunday issue with a dash of humor. It flavors the monotony of scandal, politics, and pseudo-science. Lawton Mackall's endeavors have furnished many a Sunday editor with this ingredient. His bits — mostly of the conventional humorous essay style — read well on Sunday mornings. Then they are taken but one at a time. Lieber and Lewis have collected many of these bits — and possibly some new ones — into "Bizarre". Were the book issued with instructions to take no more than, at the most, one chapter a day, the collection might seem funny. But to read them all at once is like trying to make a meal of chutney.

Jesse W. Weik's "The Real Lincoln, a Portrait" (Houghton Mifflin) is an interesting study of a more human being than the category of virtues which makes up the Lincoln of schoolbook tradition. It is a relief to know that the only reason our respected patriot and president sat up all night to study was because he happened to enjoy it. And that he didn't indulge in rail splitting save when it became essential to his living that he do so. This is a simple if not overinspired picture of a brilliant intellect and a humanly faulty, as well as divinely virtuous, character.

Man's unconscious refuses to admit the possibility of his own death but desires the death of his enemies, just as did primitive man, and the civilized attitude toward death should make room for these unconscious truths, declares Sigmund Freud in "Reflections" (Moffat, Yard), a brochure translated by Dr. A. A. Brill and Alfred B. Kuttner. The way in which humanity, in throwing off its restraints during the war, returned to primal instincts prompted Freud to give this psychoanalytic explanation of human conduct as it is influenced by the repressed conception of death. As ever, he wants people to realize what forces are at play in the unconscious in the hope that this understanding will bring sanity into human and international relationships.

How widely apart can be the careers of two men with the same beginnings in life, a comparison of Ludwig Lewisohn's "Up Stream" with "Under Four Administrations" (Houghton Mifflin), the autobiography of Oscar S. Straus, shows. Both men were the foreign born sons of immigrant German-Jewish parents, settled in the south. Straus was a prosperous lawyer before he was thirty. As he tells it, his entry into diplomacy was almost casual and his further career of public

service followed quite naturally. It seems a pity that Mr. Straus hardly mentions the businesses which afforded him sufficient income to pursue that career. Certainly, the history of the Straus fortune is as characteristic of the last half century as is Mr. Straus's public life.

Whiting Williams is a sentimental traveler among the masses. He treats the working man as a phenomenon. "Horny Hands and Hampered Elbows" (Scribner), like his earlier book "What's on the Worker's Mind", is good reading. But it skims the surface. As a sketchy picture of European conditions it is illuminating enough, however, and its humor serves to make alarming situations more palatable for American consumption.

To those who speak the name of Walt Whitman in reverential awe, Stuart Merrill's diminutive "Walt Whitman" (Saunders) may appeal because it gives one more glimpse of this great American. Here is an account of a meeting between Mr. Merrill and Whitman — a meeting that in the passing of years has become a sacred memory. This memory the author tries to send out to the Whitman idolators. It is a tiny contribution to the diadem of biographical gems that recent years have fashioned.

"The Constitution of the United States" by James M. Beck (Doran) is what the title implies — a study of the origin of the Constitution, a criticism of the principles it embodies, and an appraisal of its value in the light of twentieth century conditions. The Constitution, declares Mr. Beck, is "one of the great monuments of human progress. It illustrates the possibilities of true democracy in its best estate." At the present time, he warns us in the concluding chapter, we are gradually forgetting the high principles set forth in the Constitution; we are losing our regard for individual rights and individual freedom; our civilization is becoming too materialistic and too mechanical, too inclined to excessive organization and standardization of men and ideas as well as of commodities; and we have need of learning from the Constitution the necessity of defending "the integrity of the human soul".

Carlyle once said, "Rich as we are in biography, a well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one." This rara avis Joseph Bucklin Bishop has given us in his life of "Charles Joseph Bonaparte" (Scribner). The character and works of Bonaparte, devotee of Pickwick, leader in school and college, model citizen and patriotic American, are unfolded sympathetically, vividly, interestingly. Throughout his long career Bonaparte was assailed from all sides. Yet every attack found him calm, serene, wearing that perpetual smile. This biography of our late Secretary of the Navy and Attorney-General may well be consulted for daily guidance.

A famous critic who had little use for poetry once blurbed: "Any damn fool can write good poetry, it takes a genius to write good prose." Heretical, yet somewhat true, despite the evident prejudice. Our current magazines are full of frothy, wishwash poetry, or rather doggerel. Few good, really fine poems appear in them, and careful study of those discloses the fact that they follow certain fundamental laws of versification. A paraphrase of the hysterical outburst just quoted might well be: "Any damn fool

can write good doggerel, it takes a genius to write good poetry." Perhaps with this in mind, was "The Principles of English Versification" by Paul F. Baum (Harvard) written. It is a rather technical explanation of the fundamental laws of verse making. Strict rules, basic precepts, and a minutiæ of technicalities are discussed. The serious student of the art of versification will find the book of immense but highly mechanical value. At least, after mastering its contents, he will not stoop to cheap doggerel.

Whether a first skimming of F. P. A.'s large vats of philosophy and humor would yield any thicker cream than the second is a moot question. At any rate, whatever skimming has been bowled in "Overset" (Doubleday, Page), it has the full, provocative flavor that is F. P. A.'s alone. From the characteristic dedication

To Herbert Bayard Swope without whose friendly aid and counsel every line in this book was written

to the last Socratic Dialogues the deadly barbs of F. P. A.'s irony snap in all directions like sparks from a pinwheel. There is no aerie to which American life may win to be secure from him. Yet he slays us with such winsome gambolings, such seductive waggery, that there is rich balm in every thrust.

Translation, as a profession, has always seemed to us a lazy way of dodging responsibility. We herewith take it all back. There is one translator, at least, whom we shall respect, although we may never read a book he has translated. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, who is vouched for by Stephen McKenna in "Tex" (Dodd, Mead) as one of the world's greatest translators, reveals himself through his letters to Mr. McKenna as a genius at the art of play. He is one of those rare individuals who can write a letter which is at once intimate and universal, humorous and intellectual, piquant without being flippant. The letters, never dull, cover a field of discussion from translation to sulphur spring cures, with a charming naïveté most diverting. His own rule for the art of translation begins: "The translator's first duty is not to translate. His first duty is to fear God, honour the king and hate the Germans." Mr. de Mattos's letters sparkle with wit, and be it said to the very great credit of Mr. McKenna that he does not obtrude his own person unnecessarily into the atmosphere of piquancy created by the letters. One of the few books of which it can be truthfully said: delightful!

A veritable tidal wave of books on the appraisal of human character has flooded the market of late. Any such difficult task as evaluation of human character must of necessity require much study from many and diverse points of view. "Judging Human Character" by H. L. Hollingworth (Appleton) approaches the subject from the point of view of standardized tests of mentality. It is a pedagogic discussion of the modern psychological test and its effect upon the study of character. Although cruelly logical to the point of mental vivisection, this book deals forcefully with a most interesting and elusive topic. It is not for a casual reader, involving, as it does, much psychological mathematics; but for teachers, employment managers, and others whose business requires judgment of the other fellow's mental, moral, and social

characteristics, it will prove thought provoking.

"Companionable Books" (Scribner) is a volume by Dr. Henry van Dyke in which he gives a list of the books and authors he recommends under such a heading. The Bible, particularly the Psalms, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Keats, Stevenson, and others are treated with the sympathetic handling of one who loves books not only for their novelty or brilliance but because of their companionship and because of the insight they reveal into the personality of their authors. Particularly sympathetic is the chapter on Dickens.

Howard T. Dimick's "Modern Photoplay Writing" (Reeve) is the most thorough manual of its kind that we have ever seen. The author has both theoretical and practical knowledge of the scenario and, in a readable textbook of 392 pages, he arranges his material in an interesting and effective manner. He has not made the writing of a screen play appear such an easy task that any ambitious moron can learn it in two lessons, nor has he shrouded his subject in such mystery that only the high priests of the craft can understand it. The book treats every important detail of screen authorship in a sensible fashion. It should be of much assistance to those without literary training who aspire to the golden laurels of photoplay writing, but we especially wish to recommend it to the great authors who hire special trains to take them to Hollywood and who return a month later in the day coach.

"Pirates" by the late Lovat Fraser (McBride) is a delightful book in more ways than one. First of all, a witty introduction serves to put one in the proper frame of mind for the rest of the book. Then the decorations and full page drawings, printed in black and white on colored pages, carry out the spirit admirably. Though beautifully made up and printed obviously for children, the book is really for adults. Reprinted from the "Lives and History of Notorious Pirates" by Captain Charles Johnson, the text has been modernized a little. It is lightly and satirically written and makes smooth, pleasant reading. One story for instance begins: "Edward Lowe very early began the Trade of Plundering; for if any Child refused him what he had, he must fight him. When he grew bigger, he took to Gaming among Blackshoe Boys upon the Parade, with whom he used to play the Whole Game, as they call it; that is cheat every Body, and if they refused, they had to fight him."

Under the not particularly arbitrarily chosen abstractions of "Ingenuity", "Irony", "Setting", "Drama" (Part One: "Progress in Art"); "Relapse", "Movie", "Chronicle" (Part Two: "More Craft than Art"); "Pity" and "Truth" (Part Three: "Art and Craft at One"), Joseph Warren Beach, himself both university professor and poet, follows through with both scholarliness and something of the poet's insight and sympathy "The Technique of Thomas Hardy" (Chicago University) — in so far as the novels alone comprise it. Though a bit heavy handed, this study is of definite worth both to students and to those writers, always among us, who really profit by the example of a great writer's ups and downs.

Great glimmering masses of sunset cloud-stuff — this is the mind and mold of Rose O'Neill's poetry in "The

Master-Mistress" (Knopf). An elusive, clinging medium whose utterances perforce are vague, groping, as if the spirit behind them were too languid to pierce through formlessness and subdue it to coherence and simplicity. Both the drawings and the poetry express a vast, almost prenatal helplessness. The drawings, rather better than the verse, have a look as of embryos preserved in alcohol. A large Celtic mysticism hangs over the book like a thick impenetrable sky. At times, but all too fitfully, the author wrestles with her chisel and succeeds in trimming the nebulous billows down and shaping them rather hauntingly — but through the book as a whole, one must resign oneself to wandering and wondering.

Constitutions are supposed to make dry reading. Though the fiction element may enter into the actual carrying out of their provisions, they lack fiction's charm. Professors Howard Lee McBain and Lindsay Rogers, in "The New Constitutions of Europe" (Doubleday, Page), however, have handled their subject interestingly. Part One offers a clear outline of modern European constitutional history and the postwar conditions out of which the new constitutions (Part Two) have developed. Especially interesting are: a clear exposition of the Soviet idea and (in view of a comparatively recent decision of our own Supreme Court) the fact that the constitutions of the German *Reich* and the Free City of Dantzig expressly specify that "youth shall be protected against exploitation". Any student of current European history will find the volume useful.

A companion volume to "The Youth of James Whitcomb Riley" is the recently issued "Maturity of James Whitcomb Riley" by Marcus Dickey (Bobbs-Merrill). It is a very understanding tribute to the Hoosier poet, giving, as well as an outline of the facts of his life, a great deal of the spirit of his personality by frequent quotations from his poems, his letters, and his interviews with friends. From the early, disheartening days of many failures, we follow his career to the time when he was a national figure, and encounter many of the famous men that were his friends. In fact, the biographer's desire to show the esteem in which he was held reduces several chapters to a digest of opinion (always favorable) on his merits. On the whole, however, it is a thorough and conscientious account and should be of great interest to the many admirers of the poet.

It remained for a young Englishman to write the classic history of the tragedy of Napoleon III and to do it with an understanding of his time and of the Gallic temperament that is particularly noteworthy in an Anglo-Saxon. Philip Guedalla has written "The Second Empire" (Putnam) as though he had been an eye witness of it all. There is a precision of detail, combined with a colorful, vivid quality that makes it a thing of today; a style that will please the most meticulous literary judge; an omnipresent sense of humor that sharpens every phrase. Added to which, Mr. Guedalla has a fine sense of dramatic values, making the most of romantic gesture and tense situation. Our enthusiasm is limited only by lack of space.