

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

YOUNG AND IN PARIS!

By Carl Van Doren

EIGHT or ten years ago American poetry began to look up. It discovered that verse to be sweet did not need forever to wear the mildew of Tennysonianism, or to be strong did not need to keep on forever blowing the very brazen bugle of Rudyard Kipling. It experimented, it aspired, it used its brains—and it was read. One knew that sooner or later the novelists would follow after. It looks now as if they were taking over the primacy of interest in native literature, if not the primacy of excellence. The year 1920 was a year to set down in the annals of the novel; so has 1921 been. And the second of these years has this importance: it shows signs of varying the single tone on which the revival of fiction began. Naturalism, it seems, is not to be the only school. Here is Donn Byrne letting his fancy run, in a very Celtic cloak, across the centuries and the continents with Marco Polo to love and win and lose Golden Bells, daughter of Kubla Khan. Here is Robert Nathan settling his imagination in a dainty village and delicately building up a story almost as full of sugar and spice as the nice little girls of the nursery rhyme. And here is Edward Alden Jewell blithely disregarding the war and the times and returning to the perennial theme of youth at play in Paris.

Youth with him plays very innocently, a reputable pension the scene of its activities and its hero Kenneth the amiable yet knowing boy who skylarks

with the inflammable hearts of the middle-aged pensionnaires and in the end, instead of finding a sweetheart, finds a mother and takes a swim. As a whole the book is not so clear as it might have been made; part of the time it suggests the whimsical heroics of Leonard Merrick or of William J. Locke; and part of the time it suggests a parody of that romantic fiction in which plots are laid and detected, villains and adventuresses encouraged through many chapters and then properly labeled and punished in the final chapter. But "The Charmed Circle" suggests neither of these kinds too much. It is gay in its own way, clever in its own way, touching in its own way. The ancient Cassiendra everlastingly nibbling at her turnips; Bromley the Voeuf with his entangled interests in the street cars of Athens and the fair sex of all lands; the so sensitive Mrs. Brathers, with her languors and her longings and her perturbations and her strong waters on the side; Cyprienne of the opera with her color schemes of saffron and silver-grey and sapphire blue, and her enchanting mystery; Kenneth himself, so demure at the Pension Bernard and yet so masterful in Montmartre—these and the various minor figures and their brisk careers, if they do not always fall into completely lucid pattern, yet in their own right are all amusingly seen and very deftly recorded.

What gives the book its highest quality, however, is the skill with which it has caught the color and perfume of Paris—of Paris as seen through the eye of the affectionate

and remembered by them when all the more barbarous splendors of other cities fade from the recollection. As regards this Mr. Jewell is probably orthodox: believing, it may be hoped, that Paris is after all the most civilized community in the world, and therefore the most varied, the most intense, the most profitable for a sophomore like Kenneth to have his joyful fling in.

The Charmed Circle. By Edward Alden Jewell. Alfred A. Knopf.

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