THE CONTRIBUTORS' COLUMN

DR. ROBERT T. MORRIS, a New York City surgeon of note, author of many volumes on various subjects, is the president of the American Therapeutic Association. His books vary in range from "Lectures on Appendicitis" through the popular "Microbes and Men" to his latest, "Nut-Growing". It is only in the summer that he finds opportunity to write; for his profession occupies his time and attention otherwise. He has two new books in prospect, widely divergent in theme both from his other books and from each other. WILL IRWIN, well known American short story writer, novelist, playwright, and journalist, is at present on a widespread lecture tour, speaking along the lines of his latest book, "The Next War" (Dutton). When this tour is over he will return to the east to write a new novel. Last summer he and his wife drove across the continent to Denver in a Ford in twelve days, stayed some time in Leadville, where the brothers Will and Wallace spent a part of their boyhood, then, not in a Ford, motored to Mesa Verde, the great national park of Southwest Colorado. From there they went into New Mexico to Taos, which is rapidly becoming the Greenwich Village of the southwest, what with forty-odd painters living there, and a certain number of literary ladies and gentlemen. HUGH WALPOLE, after his successful series of lectures in New York City, vanished for a tour of the United States. His recent "The Cathedral" (Doran) has been called his best work by many critics. We heard rumors of him at the Yale Harvard game; but he will not be in New York City again until February. J. L. MCLANE, JR., is a young Maryland man who affirms stoutly that he has never been longer than six months at a time in any college. He has published three volumes of verse, "Driftwood" and "Spindrift" (Four Seas) and "Shafts of Song" (Norman, Remington). Last year he catalogued fifteenth century books for the Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library at Harvard. Just now all that he is doing, he writes, is reading Gibbon's "Decline and Fall".

VINCENT STARRETT is editor of "The Wave", that picturesque publication from Chicago. He is a more ambitious and a luckier poet than most, for this season he is publishing two volumes of verse at almost the same instant, "Banners in the Dawn" and "Ebony Flame". ELSIE SINGMASTER (Mrs. Harold Lewars) is an American novelist of growing power. Her novel "Bennett Malin" (Houghton Mifflin) was published last June. She lives in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where she says that she writes and reads and works, and now that the country roads have been improved, can get to town for an occasional concert. CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER is the author of "Pioneers of the Old Southwest" (Yale) and other historical volumes as well as poems, a novel, and plays. For the past few years historical work has been her main interest and her books are used in various schools and colleges. THOMAS WALSH, the author of several books of poems and a translator of Spanish and interpreter of Spain to America, has just finished a biographical study of Sister Juana

Ivés de la Cruz of Mexico. She was a poetess, it seems, and the first American asserter of woman's rights. She lived from 1651 to 1695, wore her hair short in flapper style, and desired to wear men's clothes so as to study at the university then closed to her sex. She advocated a single standard of morality for men and women.

JOHAN J. SMERTENKO is a frequent contributor to various of the critical reviews. He is working, he says, on a historical drama and an autobiographical novel, meanwhile lecturing on modern drama and English literature at the extension sessions of Hunter College. KATHERINE SPROEHNLE, an attractive young Chicago lady who has for some time been assistant to Fanny Butcher in her famous bookshop, has now emigrated to New York. WILLIAM FRANCIS HOBSON refuses to give any autobiographical data in regard to himself, but he is well known to patrons of a certain New York store as a most obliging and intelligent seller of books. MATTHEW BAIRD, JR., was graduated from Princeton, has written off and on since, and has been famous as a bookseller connected with Campion and Company in Philadelphia. He is at present working on a novel, which seems to be true at the moment of most contributors to THE BOOKMAN. HARTLEY BURR ALEXANDER, teacher of philosophy at the University of Nebraska, is the author of the Ak-Sar-Ben pageant "Coronado in Quivera" given in Omaha last September, a two night dramatic representation of the coming of the Spaniards into the Missouri Valley in 1541, with music by Henry Purmort Eames. Several of Professor Alexander's lyrics have also been heard on the concert stage. He is now working at a new dramatic form for American Indian myths. ARTHUR MOSS edits "Gargoyles", that exotic organ of a group of young Americans in Paris. ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY whose new book "The Business of Writing" (Doran) has lately appeared, is now engaged in the pleasant task of collecting another book of essays and ranging about for ideas on his new study of the craft of writing. JOSEPH AUSLANDER, who recently spent some time in England, has now returned to this country and lives, we believe, in Connecticut.

FLOYD DELL is working harder than ever on his new novel. Seeing that this novel involves young America he thought it wise to see the Yale Harvard game, so we took him to New Haven the other day; although he didn't cheer noisily he seemed to enjoy himself. After all, if he was cheering for Yale, it was little for him to make a noise about. STIRLING BOWEN, whom Carl Sandburg considers one of the best of our younger poets, is still in Detroit where he is a writer on the Detroit "News". JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER was recently in New York, looking both happy and prosperous. Now he has left for Cuba to aid in the filming of "The Bright Shawl" in which Richard Barthelmess is to be starred. Work on "Java Head" for the films has recently been completed. Either fortune is very kind to Mr. Hergesheimer or Knopf's publicity agents are exceedingly clever. With copies of the shawl being stolen from the windows of Brentano's in New York, and with Gracialita's statement that all Spanish dancers do not carry knives in their stockings, Mr. Hergesheimer is becoming even more popular than before. MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN has suffered much, he tells us, since the publication of "Confessions of a Book-Lover" (Doubleday, Page). In Norfolk, where he was paying a visit to relatives, he was announced as the author of "The Confessions of a Bootlegger". This mistake, he found, made him notorious and not unpopular. "What an old dear, to be so frank!" a young woman said, as she passed the table where his young relative, Philip Taliaferro, was giving him a dinner. The

demand for the book — by mail — was phenomenal in Norfolk. Naturally, there is some disappointment in that city. GAMALIEL BRADFORD is a psychographer. Since that is a term not usually applied to literary gentlemen who write for THE BOOKMAN we must explain that a psychographer is a person who spends his life in the vain effort to distil the souls of men and women from the records of their speech and action, records which are never reliable and souls which can never be distilled. EDMUND WILSON, JR., one of the collaborators in the recent "Undertaker's Garland" (Knopf) of which Simon Pure speaks so favorably in other pages of the magazine, is a young Princeton man now assisting Mr. Crowninshield in the editing of "Vanity Fair".

ORVILLE HARROLD has had one of the most extraordinary careers in opera. He made his début in burlesque and afterward sang in vaudeville, from which he was plucked by Oscar Hammerstein to sing chief tenor rôles at the Manhattan Opera House. Later he became principal tenor of Oscar Hammerstein's London Opera House, returned to America to sing with the Century Opera Company and later at the Hippodrome, after which, because of the loss of his voice, he disappeared from the music world for two years. He made a triumphant reappearance with the Society of American Singers and was at once engaged for the Metropolitan where for the last three years he has been one of the leading stars. Last season he created the tenor part in "Die Tote Stadt", in which Marie Jeritza made her American début. JAMES MELVIN LEE is director of the department of journalism at New York University, and the author of a book called "The History of American Journalism". He runs a regular department relating to books on journalism in "The Editor and Publisher" and is the executive secretary of the Intercollegiate Newspaper Association. CHARLES SEYMOUR, professor of history at Yale University, coeditor, with Colonel House, of "What Really Happened at Paris" (Scribner), writes that he is at present engaged in the study of recent diplomatic relations. He was a member of President Wilson's advisory committee at the Paris Peace Conference. MICHAEL STRANGE, author of "Clair de Lune" in which her husband, John Barrymore, played last year, is known not only as a writer but as one of the most beautiful women in New York. ALLEN WILSON PORTERFIELD, as a result of certain of his BOOKMAN articles, has been invited to make addresses at several New York libraries. ALICE ROHE has just returned from a trip to Italy, where she spends much of her time. She is a newspaper woman who during the war did extraordinary work as correspondent at Rome for the United Press Association.

FEW authors have the knack of expressing their creative creed — they are therefore at the mercy of reviewers. Rupert Hughes has become articulate in the following letter and expresses what many another writer has probably felt when reading the ultimatum of the academic critic.

TO CARL VAN DOREN:

In a published quotation from your "Contemporary American Novelists", I note that you not only pluralize me as the "Rupert Hugheses", but accuse me of "good intentions" and "a fatal lack of true distinction". You find it difficult to "dispose of" certain other writers and you regret that one of them transmutes no "lasting metal".

Now, do you really imagine that you really "dispose of" authors? Doesn't the frightful power terrify you? And since you know, will you please tell me just what you mean by "true distinction", how it differs from plain or untrue distinction, and how you came to be sure of just what is "lasting"?

Dr. Samuel Johnson did not stop at saying that "Tristram Shandy" was not lasting. In his grandest manner, he said, "It has not lasted!" It was a serial published in six volumes at long intervals and Dean Farmer told the silly students who liked it, that if they sought for it twenty years later, they would have to go to an antiquarian for it. I wonder what you will say when you are as far off from your tripod as Dr. Johnson from his. Johnson also called Fielding a barren rascal.

Locke called Blackmore, whoever he may have been, "the everlasting". Hobbes said that "Gondibert" would last as long as the Iliad. Byron called Rogers "immortal already". Anna Seward said that "Madoc" would outlive "Paradise Lost", of whose author Winstanley said that "his fame is gone out like a candle in a snuff and his memory will always stink". Voltaire called "Paradise Lost" "this obscure, eccentric, and disgusting poem despised at its birth". Coleridge said that not twenty lines of Scott's poetry would reach posterity and called "Ivanhoe" a "wretched abortion".

Sterne and Fielding and Whitman — and how many others of the immortals! — were called "low" and "vulgar" and doomed to speedy extinction by most of the critics who took their mission seriously.

Putnam's book published in 1845 to prove that America had writers did not include either as poet or prose writer the fellow Poe who was winning prize contests with both stories and poems. A few years later a cyclopædia gave him only three lines. Putnam admitted that America had as yet produced no great poetry. Have you read his selection of the best of our authors then? "The Quarterly Review" said that Shelley was "too impatient of applause and distinction to earn them in the fair course of labor". Would you have said that Shelley had "true distinction"? Aristophanes said that all of Euripides's lines had gone to hell with him. Euripides had also a "fatal lack of true distinction".

Aristotle practically ignored Æschylus in his "Poetics"; a Sicilian poet ridiculed him for his bombast, and that great critic Quintilian called him "rude and inelegant". Æschylus himself complained that the old poets were venerated above himself, and he had to wait fifteen years for his first prize. Once when he was acting one of his own plays the audience rose and would have lynched him, if he had not clung to an altar.

But I will not go on compiling instances of critical horrors. The history of criticism is paved with bad guesses as to what is lasting. If I were a critic by trade, I would avoid prophecy as a major symptom of dementia.

Of course, I don't know what posterity will think of me, if anything, but I wonder if you are really posterity's advance agent, and who signed your credentials and guarantees your decisions. My training and my toil and my ideals have been founded in much deeper and longer scholarship and artistic experience than your own or those of most of the authors you are dusting off for posterity. Why have you and they "true distinction", and I only a "fatal lack"? I don't pretend that scholarship and experience give distinction. Indeed, I don't pretend to distinction. But I marvel at your pretense of knowledge and your audacity in pinning immortal medals on chests of your own choice.

I am seriously — and not at all angrily or impatiently — eager to know just how you define "true distinction". To my benighted brain, judging from some of the laurels you award and your apparent reasons for them, distinction seems to be something synonymous with preciosity, pomposity, grandiosity, professorial levity; something antonymous with informality,

hilarity, gaiety, optimism, or cheerful cynicism.

What books of mine have you read? and wherein are they ignorant, cheap or base, truckling or insincere? Have you any real suspicion of my program, my creed, my methods, or my fitness for my high task?

In Shakespeare's time wouldn't you have found "true distinction" in Lyly and agreed with others that Shakespeare had a country bumpkin uncouthness and barbarity? Wouldn't you have placed Fletcher higher, as "the majestic Denham" did, or agreed with Rymer (who was as great a critic in his day as you in yours) that the neighing of a horse had more humanity than the tragical flights of Shakespeare? John Dennis, another big critic, found Shakespeare "utterly void of celestial fire". During the long period after his death when he was thought of without reverence, wouldn't you have exclaimed: "He has not lasted!"? Would you have held him in any higher esteem than Dryden did? or Pepys? Addison did not even include Shakespeare in his "Account of the Greatest English Poets". Would you have given him space then?

Please do not use the evasion that you are merely expressing personal reactions. You do not write with deprecation as of prejudices; you write as Sir Oracle. Some of your work has such dignity, earnestness, charm, and unusual catholicity for a pundit, that it pains me to see you tormented with a mania of grandeur and so bad a dose of your own distinction.

Just how do you define "true distinction" and how do you know that even if some of us lack it, it is "fatal"? Are you quite certain that you yourself do not suffer from a fatal lack of true vaticination?

Yours anxiously,

RUPERT HUGHES.