The typical American and some others.

That the informal essay is once more in high favor is indicated by the large number of collections of essays now being published. Even our novelists are turning to this gracious form of literature; among them, Mr. Meredith Nicholson, whose collection of reprinted "Atlantic" papers bears the title, "The Provincial American" (Houghton Mifflin Co.). Three of these essays — "The Provincial American," "Edward Eggleston," and "A Provincial Capital" — are concerned with the ideals and achievements of the Hoosier State, where, according to the author, one finds, if anywhere, "typical Americans." The typical American is provincial, for "we have no national political, social, or intellectual centre," and every county is a unit, with its own courthouse, town hall, churches, school-houses. The typical American is, therefore, self-sufficient, — so self-sufficient, indeed, that the metropolitan tendencies of the railway, the telegraph, etc., are not likely to disturb our romantic variety. The typical American is also extremely curious, eager to know what he can know of art, of politics, of other phases of human activity. He is fond of brooding and discussion, and is increasingly conscious of his own importance in our democratic society; the sense of the mass — the "fatalism of the multitude," in Mr. Bryce's phrase — is virtually a danger that has been averted. He has instinctive common sense, and, despite the misgivings of Matthew Arnold, can be relied upon to do the right thing. All of which is perhaps mainly another and illuminating version of the frequent remark that our farmers are the foundation of American excellence. From that city of estimable men and women, twentieth-century Indianapolis, with its background of "Hoosier Olympians" (of whom Mr. Nicholson writes entertainingly in the initial essay), come these cheering and, we believe as well as hope, true views of the modern American. In only one respect is the author on decidedly uncertain ground, — when he tells us that "the most appalling thing about us Americans is our complete sophistication"; compared with us, he asserts, the English, the French, the Italians are simply children. His evidence is our insistence on "bigness," our farmers' languidly ready adjustment to the automobile, our children's cool condescension in the use of the telephone. This evidence, though pertinent, is insufficient. If it is true that we are sophisticated in our attitude to automobiles, skyscrapers, and other insignia of our material development, it is likewise true that we are little more than "children" in our attitude to literature, music, painting, and the other tokens of intellectual and spiritual activity. The English reviews still refer, justly if unpleasantly, to "that quaint *naïveté* which, since Dickens wrote 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' has never ceased to astound the inhabitants of older countries." Compared with the French, the English are *naïve* in the world of ideas; how far are we, then, from the humane sophistication of the French! Aside from this unconscious outcropping, on Mr. Nicholson's part, of "the American brag," his views on American life are both wisely reasoned and agreeably presented; he is, indeed, unmistakably one of our foremost essayists. "Should Smith Go to Church?" is perhaps the most penetrating of the essays; when it first appeared in print it evoked so much discussion that no more need be said of it here. "Experience and the Calendar" and "The Spirit of Mischief" are delightful but too fragile. The "Confessions of a 'Best-Seller'" is disappointing, and, one might add, typically American in its *naïveté*.