Any story-writer who has the luck to be recommended by Joseph Conrad will get attention, but he will have to stand a more searching scrutiny than if he had offered himself unannounced. A certain standard is expected of him, and merely good work will hardly do. On the jacket of Richard Curle's "The Echo of Voices" (Knopf; $1.50) Mr. Conrad commends the publisher for his enterprise: "I think your taking him up is a good move. He has brains; he has a writer's temperament. There's a lot in him." So there is. The temperament in particular is interesting and the eyes through which Mr. Curle views our world are fresh and penetrating. There is perhaps more than a suggestion of Mr. Conrad's own method, and more than a trace of the influence of the great Russians, especially Dostoevsky. But what then? These are are no bad models for a young writer with a temperament, and Mr. Curle has had the strength to put his individual stamp on all but one of these tales. Mr. Curle is fond of rogues, the smooth, round, over-elegant, masterful men on the fringe of things who manipulate other people's money, and he is fond of interesting failures, men with or without brains who, through some flaw in the stuff of which they are made, are doomed to go down. He is interested also in the lives of quite drab people, and knows how to write their shabby little tragedies in just the right key. It is interesting to see how much, for once, can be made of that motiveless malice which inspires quite half the unkindness in the world. Malice fascinates Mr. Curle, and it gets to fascinate us, too, as we read; it is not intruded but it is always there in the most casual relations, the sand on the axle of smooth intercourse. And it has absolutely no meaning, none whatever; it does no one any good. Mr. Curle has already the skill of the master in getting under way, snaring the interest; he can sketch a character in a sentence or a phrase, and his control over natural human speech serves him almost everywhere. The traces of his novitiate are not, however, completely obliterated as yet: he does not always sustain the interest to the end, and in some of the stories there is that progressive decline which indicates that the writer is losing confidence in himself and in his power to hold the reader. Neither can Mr. Curle always quite rise at the climax to the high level of excellence which the tale as a whole maintains, and since he is a serious workman, relying not at all upon tricks but holding you only by the veracity of what he has to show, the disappointment is proportionately keen. "The Echo of Voices" is an achievement which will make those who read it wait eagerly for the next book by Mr. Curle.

Is it because of our idealization of worldly success that American novels are so richly endowed with money and motors and the spinning wheels of invisible, but highly profitable, commerce? To indicate that "Cousin Julia," by Grace Hodgson Flandrau (Appleton; $1.40), is inconsiderable would be most unfair, and yet its lack of depth and subtlety, traceable, possibly, to American social experience, is redeemed only by vivid coloring and skilful arrangement of detail. The characters are thin but unmistakably American, their chances for development too often avoided in favor of clever bits of local color. Yet the book is more than readable; its charming pictures of the middle West and its sardonic understanding of the Cinderella background of *les nouveaux* help to point a shrewd moral. For suppose that the manager of all our destinies, the American mother, marries her favorite daughter to a French marquis, should the other daughter refuse to marry a millionaire who could finance them all?

Out of the heat of Africa, from camel-tracked Sidi-bel-Abbès, comes a story of the Foreign Legion of France that for sheer adventure and hardy romance could hardly be excelled. Scorched by the sun, the Legion scrubs its clothes in the paved reservoir, eats its monotonous dinner in cell-like barracks, and spends its halfpenny a day riotously in the cafés of Sidi-bel-Abbès. In his "Wages of Virtue" (Stokes; $1.50) Captain Percival C. Wren has made a contribution to the literature of adventure. Out of all civilizations and from all countries come the members of the Legion, and their diversity of character and purpose is astounding. Whether or not you notice an overdrawing of the American's dialect, a self-consciousness in occasional epigrammatic turns of phrase, or an excess of high lights, your admiration is held throughout.

Six years ago Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick's book, "Salt of the Earth" (Watt; $1.40), could hardly have been written. To-day it will find hundreds of eager readers. Think of all you have read of the despoiled chateaux of the Marne country; all you have heard of *Kultur;* add your recollections of the group of Prussian officers who sat at the next table to you in Berlin, and you will have made your own prologue to the book. It is a chronicle of hate for Prussianism, well thought out and presented. An English girl, carried off her feet by the passion of a young German officer, marries him—and the rest of his family—in a moment of romance. Before the end of the wedding-trip his insolence and arrogance have awakened her to his tyranny. From this point we see him as we are accustomed to seeing our enemy across the trenches, brutal, insensitive, greedy, unrestrained,—a product of

Kultur. Such international marriage tragedies are not unknown. The fact that a book of this sort can be so well written, so credibly assembled, is a commentary on the fact that we are at war. Formerly most of us should have accepted the quiet gardens and thatched, stork-crowned roofs of Heidelberg and grown contemptuous of the rest.

A well-written story of boyhood never fails to find favor with grown-ups. Howard Brubaker has been a real boy, but more to the point, he has the faculty of making his readers boys again. "Ranny" (Harper; $1.40) is excellent reading.

Perhaps a natural reaction from the depressions of war is an excess of frivolity. Three of the autumn novels indicate such a mood among the writers. Cosmo Hamilton's "Scandal" (Little, Brown; $1.50), need be taken no more seriously than the fashion-plates in a popular magazine. Apparently wearied with the virtuously blind, he now turns his pen to the portrayal of those who have no such flaw in their vision. This is a "society" story. Everyone is fabulously rich, or appears to be. Only one of the characters is supposed to have red blood, and he is trapped into matrimony by the heroine, who in order to avoid the scandal consequent upon an innocent indiscretion coolly announces that she has secretly married him. Those having a taste for the sort of stories usually told over the cigars, after the women have left the room, will enjoy this bit of journalese. Something of the same situation provides Alice Duer Miller with material for "Ladies Must Live" (Century; $1.25). But Miss Miller is less highly seasoned with scandal and writes with frank humor of social pirates and their tricks. She seems to have drawn her characters from life rather than society journals and exhibits genuine wit in their handling. Louise Maunsell Field's new novel, "The Little Gods Laugh" (Little, Brown; $1.40), is about the people of whom one reads in the "society" columns. There is some clever characterization, but that is not a sufficient excuse for the addition of one more novel to the already overlong list of American mediocrities.

The story of a salt-air castle or two down on Cape Cod, where you can buy oilskins and fish-hooks and kerosene and calico after supper if you want to, is the gist of James A. Cooper's "Cap'n Abe, Storekeeper" (Sully & Kleinteich; $1.25). The fog is real fog, and the breakers are really the Atlantic,—and it was really a case of love at first sight. If your last trip to the Cape has lost any of that delicious odor of clams and seaweed that clung even to your shoelaces, you can get a new whiff of it here, with a great deal of pleasure.