

**"IMAGINARY LIVES"** by Marcel Schwob (Boni, Liveright) is translated by Lorimer Hammond, whose interpretation from the French seems excellent. At any rate, here is a book that will please all lovers of unconventional biography to a point of hysteria. Schwob has taken, for the most part, figures little known to ordinary biographical shelves. To be sure, here are Empedocles, Lucretius, Petronius, Pocahontas, Captain Kidd; but in the main these fine sketches portray the small life as it meets greatness, both of outward event and of actual passion and tragedy in its own soul. The piece on Lucretius is only seven pages long, yet it is a superb example of expert dramatization; likewise the brittle sombreness of the chapter on Gabriel Spencer. Every sketch in this book is a fine short story in itself, compact to a point which shows absolute mastery of technique. I should like to quote a little:

That is why he [Lucretius] returned to the bleak house of his ancestors, seeking the beautiful African, whom he found brewing something in a caldron over a fire. She, too, had been thinking, though her thoughts were as mysterious as the source of her smiles. Lucretius looked down into the bubbling brew as it cleared slowly, like a green and stormy sky. The woman trailed one finger gently over her forehead when she handed him the cup. Lucretius drank and his reason left him as quickly, so that he forgot all the Greek words from the papyrus scroll. Then, being mad, he learned real love for the first time, and in the night, being poisoned, he learned death.

This is not a book for those who shrink from plain speaking. It is terrifying, frank, brutal, outspoken. Its stories are of all types of persons, of muckers, degenerates, poets, princes, priests; yet for all its frankness it has a robust quality that, for me at least, seems to make it healthy.