# RECENT BOOKS IN BRIEF REVIEW

IT is quite the expected thing for young cynics to laugh at William Lyon Phelps because he is so given to enthusiasms. Then, too, he has a habit of neglecting the books young cynics cling to. Yet even cynical youth should be able to read "As I Like It" (Scribner) without too much gnashing of teeth, for the book has a quietly insistent charm—and even cynics may be susceptible to that. Professor Phelps explains in this collection of unclassified comments, which appeared in "Scribner's Magazine", that he is regarded as an enthusiast because he does not care to advertise, even by adverse comments, the books he thinks people should not read. His courage shows itself in insisting upon the recognition of current books which other reviewers pay no attention to. Even though one quarrel with him about these and other things, his pleasing conversation makes a good evening, and his latest book is just that.

Downing two birds with one stone is the achievement of Dr. Walter E. Traprock, F.R.S.S.E.U., in his latest effusion, "Sarah of the Sahara" (Putnam). The victims of this burlesque are the now unboundedly popular wild tales of desert love and war, and the pseudo-Egyptological stories that draw their inspiration from the recent discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb; both "get theirs". El Sheik Traprock, Dhub of the Moplah Tribe, outsheiks all his colleagues in recent fiction; and no beauty can approach that of his desert rose, the flaming Lady Sarah Wimpole. Hair raising adventures are everyday fare for these two—abductions and rescues fairly trip over one another's heels. Discoveries—botanical, zoological, and archæological—occur with characteristic frequency. And if laughs are substituted for "thrills", shall we not rejoice at the exchange?

In "The Malady of Europe" (Macmillan) M. E. Ravage writes an excellent diagnosis but falters when asked to furnish a prescription. To abandon the metaphor, here is an interesting and highly diverting description of how irresponsible diplomats led the unwilling peoples of Europe into a war—and how America tumbled in. The entertainment and diversion come in the form of such paradoxes as: "America sought a peace without victory; she got a victory without peace", and "The European chaos is rooted and sustained not so much in war as in the peace which concludes the war." The author carefully distinguishes between the wicked chancelleries and the righteous populace. If he had gone further and heeded Dr. James Harvey Robinson's warning against personifying the nations, he would never have printed such speeches as the one in which Russia is represented as telling America reasons for making peace and warning the innocent sister against the villainous diplomats of Europe. To have eliminated these and other speeches would have been a lamentable concession in the interests of accuracy. "The Malady of Europe" bears the same relation to history that Mencken's "The America Language" does to grammar.

Even if life be a serious matter, there seems to be no good reason why the delightful levity of Stephen Leacock should not have its place. No matter how dreary the prospect, Leacock's cleverness seems to bring a temporary forgetfulness of unavoidable dinners and unattainable peace. "Over the Footlights" (Dodd, Mead) contains some of the funniest stuff this man has done. For the most part he travesties all the recognized forms of drama, and he does it in such a way that anyone who has ever been to the theatre must, it seems, laugh. To be most appreciated these pieces should be read aloud, for there is an added enjoyment in hearing one's own laugh echoed.

Whatever his faults, the late Colonel Roosevelt had one trait which everyone, even his political enemies, will admit was unaffected. If he had a leaning toward gallery play he did it in all seriousness; never did he apologize. In "The Americanism of Theodore Roosevelt" (Houghton Mifflin), a collection of articles and sketches edited by Hermann Hagedorn, this dominant characteristic is flung full into the face of the reader. Here, one finds in the intangible what Roosevelt was in the tangible. Whether he is writing about Africa or preparedness, religion or international relations, he is the same Roosevelt—the explorer, the writer, the soldier, and the politician; never any of these separately. The articles show conclusively that while Roosevelt was a manysided man he was not a many-faced one. Perhaps this is one of the things that beat him in the 1912 elections.

"A Romance of the Nineteenth Century" (Appleton) has been skilfully woven about letters and papers of Viscount Esher by his grandson, C. H. Dudley Ward. Not only is the story itself interesting and told with charm, but it offers close, informal views of famous personages of the great and little Napoleonic periods.

Most of Paul Rosenfeld's "Musical Chronicle (1917-1923)" (Harcourt, Brace) consists of articles published originally in periodicals; nevertheless the subjects are still topical, since they include composers who are still composing, conductors who are still conducting, general tendencies illustrated by individual works, and the general *milieu*. In fact there is hardly a contemporary of any importance or distinction who is not discussed, and usually with extraordinary intuition—though hence not always with accuracy.

Essays that celebrate the joys of the simple life seem to us to exhibit their greatest charm when read on a chill November day in a heatless city apartment. To the accompaniment of a radiator that sizzles in the ineffective manner of radiators the world over there is endearing melancholy in the drone of bees. Against strident bursts of city noise the strange cries of wild birds mean sanity and freedom. These are, alas, fleeting moods, but we lay them to the gentle persuasive prose of "The Magical Chance" (Houghton Mifflin). Men like Dallas Lore Sharp live close to the beating heart of nature; they write with a common simplicity and directness about life. Occasionally poetry disturbs the quiet jogtrot of the essay, and often humor quickens its pace. But the most potent quality of the book is in the author's deep conviction that "life offers a magical human chance" to all who have an open mind and an understand-

ing heart. No detail in the great pattern is too crude or insignificant to be considered, if we look upon it from the true angle of perspective and with the narrowed kindly eye of intelligence.

In "The Life of Lord Rosebery" (Doran) E. T. Raymond has given us a critical, carefully drawn picture of one of the most enigmatic and interesting figures in nineteenth century English politics. Lord Rosebery's life was a brilliant series of contradictions and triumphs never quite achieved. Though he gloried in and never forgot his noble birth, "it might almost be said that his political life opened with a campaign against the order to which he belonged. It closed with a fierce denunciation of the one successful assault on the powers and privileges of that order. Lord Rosebery's road between these two points", continues Mr. Raymond, "was scattered with discarded ideals, and he arrived at the end of the journey with but one surviving enthusiasm, his passion for the Empire." The causes of this political instability the author does not undertake to explain. He merely redraws for us Rosebery as the world saw him —the brilliant, whimsical, eloquent, unsatisfactory, but always very "noble lord" whose failure remains one of the unsolved riddles of history.

The first collected book of verse of Wallace Stevens, laureate of the intellectual gymnasts, has been issued under the title "Harmonium" (Knopf). The volume is polychromatic in substance and format. Mr. Stevens has a highly individual argot, a unique pungency in conveying sense impressions, and a gay diablerie in arranging grotesque word patterns which seem quite liberated from time and space and prosody and all other ills to which the flesh is heir. The luxurious fancy and esoteric symbolism of the poems are strengthened, rather than enfeebled, by a mild infusion of metaphysics. One feels sure that Mr. Stevens will be not in the least disgruntled when the reviewer confesses that "Harmonium" was intelligible to him only when he fell upon this line:

> That prose should wear a poem's guise at last.

To that small minority of American citizens who were not born in the Mississippi valley, the middle west, seen through the eyes of its young Jeremiahs, has gradually taken on the aspect of an empire of materialism, doomed to cultural stagnation. In all this symphony of despair the flute notes of Vachel Lindsay are heard with some difficulty; it requires the observations of a seasoned traveler, a delver into the richly storied past of city, town, and countryside, to picture this section, the real America, in its true perspectives. Such a one is John T. Faris, whose "Seeing the Middle West" (Lippincott) opens vistas of natural beauty as lovely as they are unexpected. If anyone doubts that the "ota" states may boast scenery as weirdly beautiful as Colorado, let him look at the dozens of splendid illustrative photographs of these too little known regions. And for those who still hold that the only fascinating history of our commonwealth was enacted in the neighborhood of Boston Common there are scores of tales linking the middle west with the most romantic being that ever stalked the plains — the American Indian. In its two hundred and fifty pages Mr. Faris's book covers thousands of square miles of plain and hill, and it would seem that there is hardly an acre that cannot return a colorful past.

Mark Twain's fame may not be enhanced by the sketches and articles collected in "Europe and Elsewhere" (Harper), yet the volume offers much to interest and amuse the lover of the great humorist. Although parts of the book are as delightfully comic as one could anticipate, Twain shows himself largely in his more serious aspect; he shows the earnest, thinking face that looks forth from beneath the mask of satire and burlesque. He may not always be at his best when he deserts his comic muse, but he is always worth reading and readable; and, even while preferring his humor, one feels thankful for some of the serious pieces gathered together in this collection, for they provide a clear and accurate clue as to the mind and personality of the man.

When Lionel Johnson in 1892 ventured to speak his mind upon Thomas Hardy, he produced a piece of criticism so solid, so finely interpretative, so balanced by scholarship and enlivened by the appreciative faculty of an authentic poet, that it has weathered thirty-one years without "dating" and is generally recognized as holding a permanent place in our critical literature. Such acknowledgment of the weight of "The Art of Thomas Hardy" (Dodd, Mead) is reflected in the printing of this new edition, with a supplementary chapter on the poetry by J. E. Barton, a bibliography by John Lane, and two portraits of Mr. Hardy.

The Fourth Dimension opens up vistas beyond human conception, yet vistas fraught with fascinating possibilities for him who would view them imaginatively. Claude Bragdon makes this amply apparent in his latest volume, "A Primer of Higher Space" (Knopf), wherein he attempts not only to show the actuality of a Fourth Dimension but to indicate what it implies. Although narrower in range and less poetic in treatment than the author's previously issued "Four-Dimensional Vistas", this book will serve excellently as a guide for one who desires to make his first acquaintance with higher space. Mr. Bragdon's style is as lucid as his difficult subject will permit, and the unavoidable obscurities of the text are mitigated by a series of plates that are both original and graphic.

In his "Economics of the Hour" (Putnam), J. St. Loe Strachey, editor of the English "Spectator" and author of "The Adventure of Living", makes a plea of much eloquence and some sense—if you overlook his false premises as of no importance—for individualism, independence, and freedom, as he would have us believe for "all living". Waste energy and waste mentality go by the board with him. For one thing, he doesn't seem to realize that more manufactures are most likely to mean less man power left for agriculture; for another, that more money and shorter working hours in return for heightened efficiency on the part of the employee will not mean unmixed blessings, unless education raises and clarifies the laborer's ideals. In contrast, Mr. Strachey's condemnation of the many abuses of labor unions, his inquiries into commerce, national debts, a levy on capital, unemployment, and "Charity, True and False", will repay the most careful consideration. As a whole, Mr. Strachey topples though. His "calm authority" rests on the indefensible premise that production, not consumption, is the basis of living; his "tolerance and sanity" fail to observe the

no less than horrors of manual and mental waste inherent in the present expensive "creating of a demand" for this or that article, whether medicine or poison to its purchaser; he doesn't stress a cent's worth the horribly expensive deterioration of brain power inevitable within any mere mechanical occupation. Mr. Strachey's salutations to "the working mothers of England", his preaching "character" to England's (and America's) "fathers", cannot possibly avail anything. Men mechanized cannot hear sweet songs!

It is surprising that more good poetry has not come from our convents and monasteries. Certainly, the thoughts of these men and women devoted to contemplation must find verbal expression. Possibly, much that is written within the walls is not published. If such is the case one can well rejoice that "Knights Errant" (Appleton), the work of Sister M. Madeleva of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, has been printed. One would expect these poems of a nun—religious in subject, simple in phrasing, with an unsophisticated dignity and quietly deep emotion. What one may be surprised to see is that they are written in the modern verse idiom, a mode of expression entirely consistent, however, with the subject matter.

Arthur Ponsonby may be allowed to summarize his own book, "English Diaries" (Doran). Says Mr. Ponsonby in his preface: "I have not set out to select the best diaries or even only good diaries. My object has been to give a full representation of all shades of diary writing, long and short, historical, public and private, good, bad and indifferent." The scope of this book is enormous; it covers English diarists like a tent from the sixteenth century to W. N. P. Barbellion, whose sensational "A Last Diary" appeared as recently as 1921. The method is a combination of narrative, interpretative comment, *précis*, and direct quotation. On the whole it is highly successful, for it carries on with the fluidity of fiction, and no hint of the pursed lips of the literary historian.

With no signs yet apparent that there will be an end to the dissemination of knowledge by outline, we come to "An Outline of Humor". Potential readers will be perplexed as to whether "An Outline of Humor" is a joke book or a monograph, for it is edited by Carolyn Wells and published by E. P. Dutton and Company. It is both and neither. There is an extended treatment of the theories of humor, historical analysis of ancient and modern humor, and separate divisional treatment of seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century humor in all Christian countries. This gives the book its merit for the student. There is, too, generous quotation to illustrate the historical development. This gives the outline the effect of an anthology, removes the stigma of scholarship, and will win for it an honored place in the inglenook.

"Social Ideals in English Literature" (Houghton Mifflin) was first published in 1898. Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy have necessitated a new chapter on the moderns, this one as well as the others being the work of Vida D. Scudder. There is no particularly evident critical faculty shown in this book, but there is a clearly written analysis of the social beliefs of the whole English literary gallery. The author of this study digs into the books of famous men to unearth the nuggets of conviction underlying plot and char-

acter sketches. Those who read the men discussed hardly need this guide, but for persons seeking an exposition of the trend of social thought since men wrote in English, here is an easily read and understood volume.

"Parties and Party Leaders" (Marshall Jones) is a large book, the contents of which must be obvious from the title, prepared by Anson Daniel Morse, late professor of history at Amherst. Professor Morse takes up his subject with expected academic thoroughness, to such an extent, in fact, that it is for students rather than for casual readers. There is a tremendous amount of information here. Dwight Whitney Morrow has written the introduction.

Unquestioning faith in Will H. Hays is behind the optimistic chapters written by Edward S. Van Zile and published under the title "That Marvel—The Movie" (Putnam). The book describes in glowing terms the part that the moving picture is destined (in the author's firm belief) to play in civilization. The volume is described in its subtitle as "a glance at its reckless past, its promising present and its significant future". Mr. Hays has written an introduction, just as glowing.

Frederik Poulsen jumps back over the last few decades to offer delectable European reminiscences. "Travels and Sketches" (Knopf), translated from the Danish by someone unnamed, is unusually pleasant. There is flavor in every chapter—a mellow flavor of yesterday that can be found in so few postwar books. The story of the beer drinking German students and that of the amorous Polish noblewoman stand out among all the rest, but each one is good. It is strange that work presented so well should be published without credit to the translator.

For the stodginess of the average "Opera Guide", Newman Levy's "Opera Guyed", with pictures by Rea Irvin (Knopf), affords a delightful antidote. It may be commended especially to the serious opera lover; and its happy rhymes, couched in the colorful argot New York speaks but does not, as a rule, write, summarize the leading scores of the repertory ("Tristan", "Pelleas and Melisande", and "Tosca" are treated with the same cheerful irreverence) with a wit and humor that captivate. Perfect Wagnerites as well as others who speak of opera with bated breath, will no doubt be shocked, notably at a "Walküre" in the best *kosher* idiom, but the shock should be a salutary one. Even though they see in it a profanation, however, none, to use one of its author's own picturesque lines, should miss it for "such a damn fool cause as that".

The most attractive binding and illustrations of "The Lure of Amateur Collecting" by George Blake Dexter (Little, Brown) counteract with some effectiveness the slightly forbidding title. As a matter of fact, the book is composed of stories and incidents gathered during a life of collecting and travel. Some are very interesting, all are clearly and pleasantly told; but the reader is inclined to fear that even as does the book, so this occupation must grow rather dull occasionally. Especially if one did not have the almost miraculous luck and gift for forming important acquaintanceships which the author undoubtedly possesses. Most of the objects are of considerable value, and many are now in various museums. The silver clasp, which is

perhaps least important from that point of view, has much the most delightful history.

It is too bad that Jay G. Sigmund does not write worse verse. It would then be possible to say that he does not soar on "Pinions" (White). As a matter of fact, the volume is not a great contribution to the stock of modern poetry. The poems are by no means devoid of interesting phrasing; they show evidence of close observation; they display the author's ability at versifying. One is entitled to demand that a book of serious verse be more than this.

"The Human Side of Fabre" (Century) seems an inadequate title. For Fabre, to us, not merely had a human side but was all-human. That quality has been to a large extent the charm of the man and of his work; through it the humblest of insects was humanized. But Percy F. Bicknell in this book (apart from its title) has done a very good piece of work. Fabre, his work, his interests, his personality are delightfully portrayed for us, and with easy continuity. The story is told largely in Fabre's own words and though some of it has appeared in other volumes it is all an essential part of this book as well. All Fabre admirers—and they are legion—will want to own Mr. Bicknell's study.

There is real amenity in Zephine Humphrey's account of how she and "Christopher" took up life according to nature's simple plan in a Vermont farmhouse. "Mountain Verities" (Dutton) she calls her chronicle of postwar rural housekeeping, and her discoveries include self discovery, discovery of the unsung joys of the kitchen, and of her husband's charming catholicity in culinary and other domestic emergencies. The current literature of domestic contentment is slight enough in bulk, and Zephine Humphrey performs timely service in affirming the possibilities which still inhere in a life by one's own fireside.

The aim of Paul Landormy's "A History of Music" (Scribner) seems to be merely to give at least one opinion for every one of as many names as possible; and this aim seems also to have guided the translator, Frederick H. Martens, in his supplementary chapter on music in America. The book is therefore crowded with personal opinions, arrogant, patronizing, or, in the case of French composers, sentimental. Its obvious French bias gives us on the one hand a valuable account of French music, and on the other a treatment of German music that is almost ludicrous; so that we are not wholly surprised to find, on page 356, that "with regard to the value, abundance and variety of its productions, France to-day takes first rank among the musical nations of the entire world."

When an author makes a point of saying at the beginning of a book of light essays that all the sketches contained therein are wholesome, we confess to a sinking feeling as regards their possible humorous content. Wholesomeness is one quality, in our opinion, that has no relation to humor; with all due deference to Dr. Frank Crane, Walt Mason, and Bruce Barton, we contend that humor should be less helpful and more amusing. For that reason, "Why Don't You Get Married" (Doran) seems to us to fall short of the ideal that such writers as Leacock and Cobb have set for us. It is not so much that Norris Hodgins lacks the

persuasiveness of the first rate humorist, but that he mixes with his humor the too often platitudinous counsel of the writer of newspaper sermonettes. And yet, there are chuckles enough in this book with the sardonic title, especially in pieces like "On Buttons", in which the author describes the distraught commuter rushing for his morning train feeling that he has buttoned those things which he ought not to have buttoned and left unbuttoned those things which he ought to have buttoned! The drawings by Robert E. Johnston are both decorative and funny, and rather too sparsely scattered through the book. One could wish that the author, like his illustrator, had put his best foot forward.

Dr. Jessie Wallace Hughan's "A Study of International Government" (Crowell) begins with a somewhat hasty survey of the historical foundations for the League of Nations. Yet even the hastiest survey of various past schemes, notions, and practices, from primitive relationships down through the Greek amphictyonies, mediæval theocracy, and so on, is worth recommending to the attention of all League worshipers everywhere. A sound, inevitable treatise that puts all open minded people face to face with the failures, jealousies, encouragements to imperialism inescapable in any all but all-powerful, permanent Council dominated by five momentarily victorious nations, this book offers the only tenable advice easily deducible: education, simplification of industries; even those last foes of violence and selfishness generally—love of one's neighbor and a will to peace.

The whimsical sentence, "Going up from London to East Anglia in spring is travelling back from May into April", takes us straight into the semi-archaic, semimodern flavor and inner precincts of H. J. Massingham's "adventures on English Coasts, Heaths, and Marshes, and also among the works of Hudson, Crabbe and other country writers" that comprise his "Untrodden Ways" (Dutton). Whether or not all these paths of the spirit among books, birds, and life generally have been trodden or at any rate approximated by Richard Jefferies, Thoreau, Edward Thomas, Hudson, and others matters not at all to the lay reader. This is no book for the professional reviewer. This is a rare wine, to be leisurely sipped!

Tragedy in the hands of the inexpert becomes humor; humor handled by those who know it not becomes tragedy. This sage remark is prompted by a reading of "The Outline of Everything" (Little, Brown) by "Hector B. Toogood", with a "critical survey of the world's knowledge" by "Sir J. Arthur Wellswater, R.A., H.G.", and an introduction by "Hughe Jawpole". The book is, as the name indicates, an intended burlesque of the numerous "outlines" that have been done in the last few years. One or two funny things are said in the book, but the average for humor is low. Herb Roth's pictures are far better than the text.

"Harvard Memories" (Harvard) is the product of press agenting de luxe, The book contains three speeches by Charles W. Eliot, and numerous illustrations. It is a worth while departure from usual college catalogues. Potential freshmen, fed on Harvard traditions from infancy, and faithful graduates, dieting on the same traditions in old age, should all like it.