RECENT BOOKS IN BRIEF REVIEW

CORRA HARRIS called the Psalms of David a "singing autobiography". We cannot at the moment think of a better way to describe her own "My Book and Heart" (Houghton Mifflin). Like the stories in "A Circuit Rider's Wife", this personal account is torn from the very fibre of her homespun existence, and it possesses her rare scriptural exaltation tempered by unfailing humor. In a mischievous instance, she admits that it has all been "cheerfully expurgated", but readers will not find her evading those crises of life in which the soul quails before the awful realities of existence. So closely webbed are the substance of the book and its form that it is impossible to divorce style from the incidents recorded. Like her personality, Mrs. Harris's idiom is wise and witty; like her life it is warm and vital with a marvelous shuttle of images that sparkle with the freshness and charm of homely actuality. For the reminiscences of a woman whose work has taken her often into the camps of the literati and their publishers, this chronicle is singularly devoid of the usual chitchat about writing personalities. As we read the sprightly and tender account of her spiritual meanderings, we have a growing belief that Corra Harris is far more interested in the heart than the book.

In these degenerate days when the chain newspaper and the news and feature syndicates have made American journalism perilously monotonous, it is good to have flourishing among us one form of personal journalistic effort — the "column". "The Bowling Green" (Doubleday, Page) is a kind of monument to one of these columns. It is an anthology of verses contributed to the column of that name founded by Christopher Morley in 1920 in the New York "Evening Post". The verses, selected from the column's "clients" by Mr. Morley, include the work of several writers of eminence — Hilaire Belloc, Stephen Vincent Benét, William Rose Benét, Vachel Lindsay, John Macy, William McFee, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Genevieve Taggard, and Elinor Wylie — and follow, in the main, the antiquarian and bookish interests which identify Mr. Morley and his "kinsprits".

Herbert Adams Gibbons is not the first to cite Washington's Farewell Address as the basis for America's foreign relations. Interpretations of the words of the Father of his Country vary — and in "America's Place in the World" (Century) the author throws his own light on the speech delivered in Fraunces's Tavern. Isolation is a position which Gibbons regards as growingly untenable. On the other hand, to enter a League of Nations he regards as dangerous until we have cut our diplomatic eye teeth. A wary participation in international affairs, with a reasonably far sighted self interest as our avowed aim, is what he urges. America has overestimated her moral influence, and the value of her disinterestedness. We have become partizans of that nation and this, regardless of where our own advantage lay. But such a summary must make Mr. Gibbons's reasonable and plausible book seem dogmatic and overassured. As a matter of fact, it presents an ex-

cellent analysis and solution of a problem America must work out.

A very special prize should go these days to the young writing man who is not ridden by the urge to be cynical or smart. Alec Waugh's "Myself When Young" (Brentano) is a wise and humorous book of such a young man's thoughts on cricket, love, literature, London, and — more cricket. To us the charm of the English pastime can never quite justify so many pages devoted to its praise. But we are reminded, at the same time, that Heywood Broun's raptures over Babe Ruth would doubtless be equally incomprehensible to an English reader. To say that Mr. Waugh's style is smooth and delightful is to underpraise it. Journalistic writing, hasty, amusing, and sometimes brilliant, but too often assembled with little time for form, has largely displaced the familiar essay. We are grateful, therefore, that this form has come into its own again in such expert hands. Perhaps, too, the author's ability to put a story together has lent to some of these sketches the added intimacy of fireside tales that have a rambling, meditative quality. The word "confessions", used to describe the book on the jacket blurb, is misleading in that these revelations of a young man's heart and mind are never guilty, though couched in the idiom of sophistication. It is a keen, wideawake sophistication, much to be preferred to the weary world-knowledge of the younger generation.

The canon to the effect that an author should be as facile in the art of omission as in that of inclusion seems ever too bitter a pill for the ailing recorder of personal experiences. "Adventures in the Near East" (Dodd, Mead), by that doughty English soldier Lieutenant Colonel Rawlinson, runs to 353 large pages. Condensed with some selective skill to about 250 small ones, it might become an exceedingly interesting and informative exposition of the delicate problems that England has been attempting to solve in those restless regions around the Bosphorus. That it could, with any amount of revision, become something more than an exposition, remains highly doubtful. The author has been at some pains to give his alarums and excursions the poignantly intimate touch; in so doing, he has succeeded only in impairing the value of the work as an historical document. For the rest, it throws revealing light on Near Eastern geography and the Terrible Turk's inhumanity to man.

J. E. Spingarn, literary critic, controversialist, æsthetician, and ardent exponent of the philosophy of Croce, comes before us with a mildly surprising volume of "Poems" (Harcourt, Brace). Mr. Spingarn's verses are as dextrous as a disciplined intelligence can make them, and they breathe with a livelier, if not a purer, flame than the austere *Lux et Veritas* of the scholarly ideal. Full blooded, frank, and jaunty as he is, however, Mr. Spingarn seems even in his best moments to translate emotion, passion, sensibility, into what is, after all, various states of intellectual excitement.

Despite the example of Lincoln and Disraeli and a number of others, it is not every successful politician who is capable of expressing himself with even a gleam of literary quality. But Premier J. Ramsay MacDonald of England proves an exception to the rule. In his biography of his deceased wife, "Margaret Ethel MacDonald" (Seltzer), he displays a beauty of style and

of sentiment that at places verges on the poetic. Such gorgeous patches, it is true, are not to be found on every page, for the greater part of the book is devoted to matter of fact exposition; but there are some passages that are memorable, as for example when Mr. MacDonald observes with picturesqueness and feeling:

> The uncertainties of life and the vanity of men are often proclaimed by an edifice that is crumbling before it has been built. A confusion of broken pillars, of grass-grown courtyards where the foot of the possessor never fell proudly, of rooms never sheltered from the wind and the rain, of windows through which only the yellow dead moon has shone, of silence where there was to have been gaiety and feasting — such are the home and the temple that it is the fate of many men to leave behind them.

Hilaire Belloc is interested in distinctions. "My thesis is that the New World is wholly alien to the old", he says in his book of new reflections upon America, called "The Contrast" (McBride). Obviously, Mr. Belloc isn't about the tasks of the Anglophile. What he is about is the compilation of impressions and reflections upon society, politics, literature, and geography. "The Contrast" is too fluid, too easily journalistic, to have caused Mr. Belloc much labor. But if it is a light book, it is not a bad one. Mr. Belloc is too accomplished a craftsman for that! It is, rather, an affair of pippins and cheese in which Mr. Belloc (purporting to be addressing his countrymen) really talks over his shoulder to us about that most interesting topic — ourselves.

A large part of the American music loving (i.e. opera going) public is interested primarily — and breathlessly — in the personalities and private concerns of musicians; and musicians, in turn, are quite willing to capitalize their personalities and private affairs. The periodic result is a "life" of this or that soprano, indistinguishable from the life of any other were it not for the name and the photographs. Maria Jeritza is the latest object of interest, and "Sunlight and Song" (Appleton) the latest of the "lives". For so and so many pages Madame is all that a public character must be — successful, generous, forgiving, humble, and wholly innocuous. In this one sees that she is also quite ingenuous, and presumably the most interesting parts of the book were not written. Madame's obiter dicta on matters extra-Jeritzian are most charitably not quoted.

Between 1878 and 1881 Lafcadio Hearn was an assistant editor on the New Orleans "Item". Some of the newspaper articles he wrote during that time have been gathered in "Creole Sketches" (Houghton Mifflin). The fifty or more pieces are of a varied character — odd and rather stilted essays on a multitude of topics, dialect conversations, songs and street cries in the Orleans patois, editorials, recipes, and even a review of Cable's "The Grandissimes". There are a few wood block illustrations, drawn and cut by Hearn himself. It is seldom enough that the early journalistic pieces of even the most famous have sufficient merit to make their perpetuation justifiable on literary rather than documentary grounds. It is a real tribute to the genius of Lafcadio Hearn that these pieces are worth reading for their own sake.

This time it is the editors of "Vogue" who have compiled a book of etiquette. They seek to present not only "Etiquette's commandments, but Etiquette's philosophy", and take pains to state, for the benefit of the skeptical,

the reasons underlying such of custom's usuages as are based on reason. The chapter on "Speech and Its Vulgar Refinements" might well be taken to heart. As for "The Unmarried Man in Society":

> He must not allow his good nature (if he has a good nature) to leave him helpless in the clutches of lovely ladies who insist upon his doing things he can not or should not do, like playing for higher stakes than he can afford or taking beauty to places where beauty has no business to go, but insists on being taken.
> . . . the gayest Cavalier might easily say: "My dear fellows, I'd be with you like a shot if I could afford it; no one loves play more. But I have not a penny to jingle on a tombstone."

No gentleman, we learn, "permits himself to drink to excess, nor to be ever in the slightest degree intoxicated before a woman". Careful scrutiny of the corresponding chapter on "Bringing Out the Daughter" fails to reveal a similar injunction for the young lady of today. We suggest that this equal rights amendment be incorporated in forthcoming editions of "Vogue's Book of Etiquette" (Condé Nast).

Upton Sinclair often lays himself open to ridicule and, unlike most reformers, is sensitive about it. This is a pity, because though he is often wide of the mark most of those who make fun of him are as incapable of his abilities as they are of his capacity to feel. Mr. Sinclair really *cares* about things; he hates injustice, poverty, and suffering, and, believing the capitalistic system is responsible for these evils, he goes for it tooth and nail. His latest book "The Goslings" (Sinclair), a companion volume to "The Goose-Step", is an inquiry into our secondary schools which, according to the author, are the prey and instrument of Wall Street, grafters, and professional one hundred per centers. He is probably wrong in a hundred details, but perhaps not entirely so in his conclusions. American opinion is becoming dangerously regimented and the suspicion sticks that the schools, both public and private, instead of encouraging independence of thought and individual search for truth, are laying down dicta which teachers and pupils question at their peril.

A good thesis doesn't always make a good book. Indeed, their purposes are quite diverse, and often inimical to each other. For example, Alexander Kaun's critique, "Leonid Andreyev" (Huebsch), is ineffective as a book at precisely the points where it is strong as a doctor's dissertation; it is copiously annotated in several languages, minutely indexed, and carried off with the profound pedestrianism of the modern literary specialist addressing his fellows from the rostrum, say, of the convention hall of a learned association for the promotion of Slavic scholarship. Mr. Kaun — and this is our quarrel with him — has not emended his book sufficiently for general circulation. It still smacks of the fine chirography of fat packs of library cards, of bibliographies, and of the august committee which inquired into Mr. Kaun's mind before certifying its soundness and erudition. It's a pity!

Most critics of the drama retain, side by side with a keen perception of the beauty of stage values, a quick and accurate knowledge of the dramatic in everyday life. And no phase of existence exhibits such a continuous first night quality as the human comedy of the tourist. In "The Three Fountains" (Scribner), Stark Young contemplates certain comic nuances of the Anglo-Saxon character abroad in the Continent, and perceives with a whim-

sical and often profound penetration the true nature of the Latin. He has observed satirically how the average tourist misses the significance of beauty with almost uncanny accuracy. These people do not suffer from what his delightful "Monsignore", in the sketch "County Matters", calls "the weakness of the long vista, the malady of horizons". We have a notion that too few of the critics themselves are afflicted with this disease, which has, by the way, left the author with so satisfying a background for his æsthetic interpretation. There is much of Italy here: colorful studies of places and people. There is something of Spain, and a great deal of England and America — on tour, of course. And through the book runs a sympathetic picture of the Latin mind subtly contrasted with the Anglo-Saxon, all done in Mr. Young's characteristic, finely chiseled prose.

"A biography is that form of history proper which relates the facts and events of individual experience." While most biographies fall far short of this definition, William Sloane Kennedy, in "The Real John Burroughs" (Funk, Wagnalls), writes "the whole truth". Mr. Kennedy and Burroughs were friends. While he gives the naturalist full credit for his remarkable achievements, he also calls attention to his mistakes, his failings, his failures, his prejudices; his differences with Long, his friendship for Whitman (with whom he worked as a fellow clerk in the United States Treasury Department in Washington); his admiration for Roosevelt, his jealousy of Thoreau. The book has interesting illustrations — some of them amateur; it is well indexed for ready reference and contains an æsthetic study of "The Nightingale", the only thing of its kind in English literature, written at the request of Burroughs. There are also favorite poems and early prose writing of that grand old man.

"A Miscellany of Sense and Nonsense" is an appropriate title for the collection of choice bits from the writings of Jerome K. Jerome, selected by the author (Dodd, Mead). The book ranges from the most ludicrous and delectable nonsense to wit edged with a sharp point and covering a substratum of hidden meaning; it contains fantastic tales, amusing character sketches and caricatures, and comic and whimsical comments on things in general, from cats and dogs to marriage, from vanity to babies, from fishermen to camping excursions. Altogether, it makes delightful reading not entirely without substance, and will appeal to that large body of readers who have found entertainment in Mr. Jerome's previous books.

De Maupassant has suffered in our country as a college erotic. Added to this he has never had a competent translator, nor a decent edition. The publisher Knopf has decided to remedy this state of affairs, and if the other volumes are up to the mark of "Yvette" he will deserve well of the reading public. The brilliant Ernest Boyd is the editor and translator, and his part is almost more than first rate. The press work and binding are worthy of possibly the finest short story writer that ever graced this modern world.

In a small volume of 207 pages Anne Carroll Moore, the director of activities for children in all the branches of the New York Public Library, and recognized authority on children's books in America, gives us "New Roads to Childhood" (Doran). Miss Moore is optimistic about children's literature;

she furnishes many instances of well known adult writers who are producing artistic "juveniles". One of the "Roads" in this new collection leads through the David Copperfield Library in England, recently placed in Dickens's boyhood home. Such a charming road does Miss Moore picture, that reading of it will make any grown up wish to start at once back along this route. Always Miss Moore insists that the best illustrators, the greatest poets, the cleverest cartoonists, the subtlest playwrights, should give only of their finest productions to the little "fathers of men". She has an unusual gift for inspiring and stimulating the best of us to take pride in writing for children.

"The East Window and The Car Window", by Bert Leston Taylor (Knopf), expresses a strain of reflective sentiment quite as delectable as the famous columnist's astute and versatile humor. Fragments of the American scene are framed in the Car Window with somewhat strained jocularity. Through the East Window one glimpses a rarely beautiful country of the mind, finely patterned and thoroughly cultivated. In this section "B. L. T." writes with appreciative discrimination that is both sincere and delicate, of nature and the stars, of poetry and music. The essays are like tiny bottles of an exquisite and potent essence. They are very brief and of a lustrous clarity, and doubly effective because their thoughts are quietly harbored in perfect simplicity.

"Culture and Democracy in the United States" by Horace M. Kallen (Boni, Liveright) demolishes the melting pot theory and explains, while it defends, the hope of cultural pluralism, which is based on the cooperation of free and varied groups, unassimilated and unified only by the ideal of democracy. The history of the dislike for hyphenated Americans which the native American of British ancestry today nurses is traced lucidly and comprehensively; it forms an interesting recapitulation of the development of the United States. The chapters dealing more exclusively with literary manifestations of the American spirit are neither so vital nor so clear; they obscure, by conjectures, attacks, and comparative trivialities, Mr. Kallen's original excellent statement of his interpretation of *e pluribus unum*. Redundancies are inevitable; but the book is remarkably free of academic tedium and propagandist rhetoric. Its contention, moreover, deserves serious thought and approbation.

Edward W. Bok confers a distinction upon himself and the "Great Hollanders" series of short historical handbooks he is editing, by issuing again Frederic Harrison's "William the Silent" (Scribner). This little book exhibits admirably Harrison's faculty for clarity and simplification in presenting a complex historical (or literary) subject. It has, too, that added interest which attaches to a last opus — Harrison died shortly after having put this book in its final shape.

Unlike many theatrical reviewers, mere journalists who sweep their swiftly gathered judgments into the great hopper of public curiosity, James Agate, staff critic of several London periodicals, considers himself an artist. He believes in thinking and writing carefully, even fastidiously. But for some strange eccentricities and affectations of approach that somewhat interfere with the balance of the whole, his book, "At Half-Past Eight" (Rich-

ards), would be a real work of art. As it is, these reprinted critical essays are stimulating, epigrammatic causeries covering a wide range of dramatic experience that includes "Punch" and the music hall as well as Barrie and Ibsen.

"The Best Poems of 1923", selected by Thomas Moult and decorated by Philip Hagreen (Harcourt, Brace), is an anthology gathered from American and English periodicals. Although there is a wide differentiation in temper and treatment, most of the poems are standardized in content and conservative in form. The utterance of the comparatively older poets is fresher and more vital than that of the serious minded and too imitative newcomers. Competence and pleasant but uninspired conventionality prevail; echoes of individuality and lyrical beauty are few. The work attains a fair average of merit, but it approaches distinction only in its technical aspect. The book is very attractively bound and printed, and the decorations are so many grace notes of a demure and charming gaiety.

Nothing new can be said by this reviewer of "L'Assommoir" by Zola (Knopf). Havelock Ellis, in an article originally published in his "Affirmations" which here serves as an introduction, says beautifully and to the point about all there is to be said of the novel's rugged author. As literary art the book is lacking in a hundred details, but its amazing and tremendous vitality transcends its obvious limitations. The translation is good and, like the other volumes of the series, is finely bound and printed.

"Where and How to Sell Manuscripts", compiled and arranged by William B. McCourtie (Home Correspondence School), is a classified directory, Who's Who, and social register of literary markets; a guidebook and book of etiquette and knowledge for writers. Though it is neither infallible nor all inclusive, its inaccuracies are yet very slight, and the most regrettable omission is failure to state the rate of payment of the various periodicals. Magazines, newspapers, class and trade publications, British and Canadian markets, publishers and producers are listed in appropriate groupings and their several wants succinctly reported. Copyright, authors' rights, and general rules are expounded. Whether the book prove a tome of impractical fascination or a mine of potentially lucrative information depends on the individual's use of it; it is, at any rate, an invaluable storehouse where facts are neatly shelved and easily accessible.

Dependable treatises on "Practical Musketry Instruction" and "The Visual Training of the Soldier" have proved for John C. Goodwin no mean approaches to his third and fourth books, "Sidelights on Criminal Matters" and, now, "Insanity and the Criminal" (Doran). Detailed, in the main dependable, readable, *distant* (fortunately for our national bigotry these inquiries probe into England's sores, not ours), the volume presents a minimum of statistics, a maximum of appropriate — many of them even illuminative — anecdotes. Here is a book for any "layman" of sufficient intelligence to recognize that we as a nation, too many of us, undermine Constitutional amendments right and left; find traffic in drugs (and oil, etc.) too personally profitable to give o'er; and with much smug satisfaction selfishly acquiesce in our national inclination to persecution rather than education and cure (if possible) of our

criminals, pacifists, revolutionaries, "social misfits" in general (we group them all as one looming impediment to our personal comfort and success). No more technical than necessary, as frank as necessary too, more in the manner of the public speaker with no particular ax to grind than in the manners of statisticians, the usual Freudians, and noisy reformers, this inquiry carries an excellent if unspectacular punch for all of us no longer our brothers' keepers.

Even aside from the valuable glimpses it affords one into the author's spiritualistic views and his interpretation of spiritualistic phenomena, "Our Second American Adventure" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Little, Brown) is interesting as a narrative of travel and as a record of the impressions and observations of a keen sighted Englishman upon a tour of America. Sir Arthur expresses unreservedly his opinions regarding American traditions and institutions, regarding cities as far separated as New York and San Francisco, San Diego and Vancouver, regarding the jails of Chicago, the motion picture studios of Hollywood, the advantages of baseball over cricket, the scenic grandeur of the redwoods; altogether, his book will be found to offer not a little interesting information along with much entertaining narration.

Perhaps Hilaire Belloc's name does not suggest to the majority the austerities of the sonnet so much as other more wayward manifestations of his Happy Muse, and yet Mr. Belloc has given this form the place of honor in a volume wherein are collected all of his poems which he wishes to preserve except the priceless jingles of "The Bad Child's Book of Beasts" and similar works. "Sonnets and Verse" (McBride) begins with a series, rather than a sequence, of thirty one sonnets, all in solemn and sometimes exalted vein, except the last three which, although they are the delightful ones beginning, "The world's a stage", a more finicking editor would have set by themselves. The opening sonnet, presumably a favorite with the author, strikes the classic note, and the customer has only himself to blame if he mistakenly reads a touch of Bellocian rakishness into the first line:

> Lift of your hearts in Gumber, laugh the Weald.

Poems lyrical, didactic, and grotesque, songs, ballades, epigrams, and the longer piece "The Ballad of Val-Es-Dunes", furnish forth a generous and representative volume. Mr. Belloc's task will be easier when he collects his cautionary tales for the young. He should be permitted, or forced, to include them all.