RECENT BOOKS IN BRIEF REVIEW

HALL CAINE has done it again. His latest novel "The Master of Man" (Lippincott) still deals with (we have the publisher's word for it) "the eternal forces of life". The scene is laid in the Isle of Man and the story concerns the temporary ignoble passion of the son of the great man of the island, its tragic consequences, and true love faithful in disaster. The plot is complicated and worked out with considerable skill. The characters are all puppets and there is nauseating talk of sin-stained men and pure women. The logic and morality is puerile, while crude instincts are patently pandered to. In fact the whole book is all the more to be regretted for being so readably written.

At the age of twenty-one Henry James began his career as a book reviewer, and some of his anonymous book reviews, never heretofore printed in book form, are now collected in "Notes and Reviews" (Dunster House). A good deal of the subject-matter has proved hopelessly ephemeral, though some good material fell to his hand: novels by Hugo, George Eliot, Trollope, and Mrs. Gaskell. Trollope, despite the author's sneaking fancy for him, irritates him, and in a review of much humor Hugo's "Les Travailleurs de la Mer" is frankly laughed at. The chief defect of the articles as criticism is that the writer, forecasting his later obsession, interests himself more in technical literary faults and virtues, particularly the former, than in the books as a whole. But aside from this defect, considering the writer's youth, the reviews are amazingly good reading. They show ability to reason from the general to the particular—the mark of a first-rate critic.

M. la Rose in a sympathetic preface writes, "James...was never a popular author and even the most devout Jacobite must admit...that he was not a 'great' one." We admit no such thing. If humor and imagination (immortal pair!) and sympathy in conjunction with a style of infinite subtlety and taste do not, in their divine infusion, as in "The Portrait of a Lady", make for a "greatness", if not a grandeur, we can name no "great" novel. And these reviews give more than a hint of the novelist's future—the same elevation of thought, the impatience at shabby personalities, the recognition of the beauty of the innocent and the bad taste, not to say downright wickedness, of the sentimental.

The dramatic skill to create a swift climax and a setting to emphasize the suspense, marks the eleven stories of the underworld which Richard Washburn Child has collected in "The Black Velvet" (Dutton). There is a good deal of similarity in the tales, especially in regard to structure—most of them reveal some arresting quality of character upon which the situation is made to turn. The author understands the value of unity and has the knack of giving verity to a unique circumstance by convincing portrayal of attending commonplaceness. The stories seem to reflect an intimate

knowledge of the ways of crooks and will satisfy readers who enjoy a thriller of the better sort.

His usual average in chuckles to the page is maintained by Irvin S. Cobb in "A Plea for Old Cap Collier" (Doran). But, for all the humor, Cobb pleads a case seriously. To those who may some day prescribe literary tonic for adolescent minds, he addresses a defense of the dime novel. Such a mind, he says, should be counseled thus: "Read these volumes openly. Never mind the crude style in which most of them are written. It can't be any worse than the stilted and artificial style in which your school reader is written." That is the argument of Cobb's plea; the humor resists summarization.

In a brief and graphic account of the horrors of starvation in Central Europe, "It Might Have Happened to You" (Lane), Coningsby Dawson emphasizes the fact that the greatest sufferers have not been responsible for their condition. The tragedy might have happened to you or me and will reach us eventually unless relief is given to the victims of the war. Thousands of people dying slowly amid the most revolting surroundings provide a miasma of despair, disease, and crime which must infect the whole world.

Why does Central Europe starve? The author finds a fundamental cause in the rearrangement of the political map by the Peace terms. These, he declares, have built walls across most of the old travel routes, have given ancient hostilities a new means of venting their animosities, have destroyed confidence and dislocated the entire system of transport. The people want work and prefer employment to charity, but they are helpless until new economic development has put them on their feet. They are without tools, clothing, or food, yet the author sees a spirit of courage in peasants and aristocrats alike which will eventually triumph if the present crisis can be weathered. The organization of the Free Youth of Germany into an idealistic society to oppose war and autocracy seems to Mr. Dawson a promising omen. The humane reader can hardly fail to be moved by the challenging appeal of this little volume.

When, early in the book, the heroine's body is found frozen in a lake, her friends cut it out and lean it against the side of a house where all may—and do—look through ice and silk nightgown to worship. The qualities of this figure evidently gave Rupert Hughes the title for his latest book, "Beauty" (Harper). The reader may suffer vicarious shocks at the exposure until he reads later that it was customary for the girl to appear before a less select public in costume no more concealing. In fact, much of the book is devoted to asserting that scant clothing on dance floor and beach is in no way a contributing factor to unconventional behavior. The story is another Hughes magazine serial published in book form.

Before reading ten pages of "Howards-End" by E. M. Forster (Knopf), we had unconditionally surrendered to its charm of diction, its inimitable humor, and its generous humanity. Amid authors overwhelmed by the dust of Main Streets, the stench of stock yards, and the noise of machine shops—dust and stench and noise seemingly too much for style or temper—we suddenly find gracious-

ness, untypified human beings, and faith in personality whether of houses or people. Indeed, the personality of a house dominates the book. Howards-End, a converted farm house, loved by a dying woman, gradually envelopes the story until finally all the strident materialists and muddle-headed idealists with the by-products of their elbow-rubbing are gathered to its breast.

The book follows the fortunes of the Wilcox family, successful, visionless, save for Mrs. Wilcox who dies early and without much stir but who, in her love for Howards-End, achieves immortality. Into the Wilcox lives come two sisters, Helen and Margaret Schlegel, each believing in personality "because personal relations are the important things for ever and ever, and not this outer life of telegrams and anger". Between the Wilcoxes of this world and the Schlegels there must always be warfare; here the victory of the latter is beautiful because it has not annihilated, but absorbed, the former.

John Freeman undoubtedly has his audience, else there would seem to be no reason in the publication of a collected edition of his poems under the title "Poems New and Old" (Harcourt, Brace). But this particular reviewer is not one of Mr. Freeman's admirers. The poet has a sense of beauty and feeling, and a very evident brilliance of thought and suggestion, but the final impression gained of him is well summarized in one of Mr. Freeman's poems, "Perversities":

> Now come,
> And I that moment will forget you.
> Sit here
> And in your eyes I shall not see you.
> Speak, speak
> That I no more may hear your music.
> Into my arms,
> Till I've forgotten I ever met you.

"Real Life" by Henry Kitchell Webster (Bobbs-Merrill) is consciously misnamed. The book is a roaring farce of the scenario type with the heroine a screen star and what, through most of the story, passes for the hero, "the greatest violinist in the world". Easy and amusing reading it is, but its humor is pretty obvious and at times lacking in spontaneity. Rather patently a hammock-in-the-shade and lemonade piece of work.

As its preface states, "Poems of the English Race" edited by Raymond MacDonald Alden (Scribner) is for readers of about eighteen years of age. And it suits its purpose well. Here are old favorites, poems with which we have mere nodding acquaintance, and ones totally unfamiliar, all more or less chronologically arranged in two sections: Narrative Poetry, and Lyrical or Reflective Poetry. Concise notes at the head of each poem (when necessary) point out its unusual significance or metrical intricacies. Excellent footnotes explain departures from modern grammatical or etymological usage. The general "get-up" and appearance of the volume lends grace to an artistic arrangement of material.

"The Seeds of Enchantment" (Doubleday, Page) is very disappointing. At the outset the tale, supposedly founded on the lore of Indo China, promises to be a thriller. If Gilbert Frankau had kept it strictly within the bounds of an adventure story it might have been, but he so often retards the progress of the mystery to acclaim the virtues of militarism, capitalism, (which surely are out of place in a Chinese mystery story), and virility generally, that the reader grows impatient.