

byterian church is turned into a garage. But there is no need to labor the point. The fact is too obvious that the old easy dominance of the "Anglo-Saxon" is passing, that he must be up and doing if he would fasten his notions upon the generations to come. And the fact is equally obvious that his success in that emprise, so far, has been extremely indifferent—that, despite the great advantages that he enjoys, of position, of authority, of ancient right, he is making very heavy weather of it, and not even holding his own. I am frankly against him, and believe, as I have often made known, that he is doomed—that his opponents will turn out, in the long run, to be better men than he is. But I confess that I'd enjoy the combat more if he showed less pathos and more skill.

Dr. Abbott himself reveals many characteristic "Anglo-Saxon" weaknesses. His incoherence I have mentioned. There is also a downright inconsistency, often glaring. On one page he denounces all opponents of democracy; on another he denounces the fundamental tenets of democracy himself. This inconsistency is visible in nine "Anglo-Saxon" revivalists out of ten. What ails them all is that they have to defend democracy, and yet do not believe in it. Has any good "Anglo-Saxon" ever believed in it? I sometimes doubt it. Did Washington? Did John Adams? Perhaps Jefferson did, but wasn't there a Celtic strain in him—wasn't he, after all, somewhat dubious, a sort of assistant American? In any case, the surviving Fathers were all apparently against him. In our own time how many "Anglo-Saxons" of the educated class actually believe in democracy? I know none, and have heard of none. The late war revealed their true faith very brilliantly, and even humorously. It was a crusade for democracy, and yet one of the shining partners was the late Czar of Russia! The assault upon imperialism was led by Roosevelt! The chief official enemy of absolutism was Wilson! No wonder the whole thing collapsed into absurdity. Dr. Abbott falls into similar absurdity more than once. His

book would be vastly more effective if he took all the idle prattle about democracy out of it, and grounded it upon the forthright doctrine that the "Anglo-Saxons," having got here first, own the country, and have a clear right to impose political disabilities upon later comers—in other words, if he proposed setting up an "Anglo-Saxon" aristocracy, with high privileges and prerogatives, eternally beyond the reach of the mongrel commonalty. This, in point of fact, is what he advocates, however much he may cloud his advocacy in democratic terms. I call upon him with all solemnity to throw off his false face and come out with the bald, harsh doctrine. There is more logic in it than in his present nonsense; he could preach it more powerfully and beautifully. More, he would get help from unexpected quarters. I can speak, of course, only for one spear. I might quibble and protest, but I'd certainly be sorely tempted. Living under an aristocracy, even as a subject, even if it be "Anglo-Saxon," is not so bad. What I object to is living under a hypocrisy.

Fiction

R. F. D. NO. 3, by Homer Croy. New York: *Harper & Brothers*.

THE SPRING FLIGHT, by Lee J. Smits. New York: *Alfred A. Knopf*.

BACKFURROW, by G. D. Eaton. New York: *G. P. Putnam's Sons*.

ALL three of these novels belong to the Middle West, and all three stand clear of the Chicago influence, now so baleful. Two come out of Michigan, "The Spring Flight" and "Backfurrow," and two deal with farm folk, "Backfurrow" and "R.F.D. No. 3." The latter has a dim sort of connection with "West of the Water Tower," a previous novel by the same author, but it is a great deal more obvious and a great deal less charming. In brief, the story of pretty Josie Decker, and her melancholy effort to escape from the Decker farm, six miles out the pike from Junction City. Josie is entered in a State-wide beauty contest by local admirers, and comes near

winning. The life of a female peasant, after that, is not for her. She throws over Orville Vert, a diligent and virtuous young farmer, and elopes with Floyd Krock, a sinister silo agent. Arrived at Kansas City, Floyd neglects to marry her and is presently jailed for stealing an automobile. So poor Josie has to come home again, *enceinte* and in a very low state, indeed. In the end she succumbs to Bush Higbee, the neighborhood Thersites. Bush is a very homely fellow and has but one arm, but his silos are the largest for miles around, and he is willing to overlook the impending baby. The curtain falls upon an ironical cackle by Josie's grandfather, an obscene ancient who has scoffed at her highfalutin notions all along.

So outlined, the novel probably seems to be a mere melodrama, commonplace and cheap. It is not. Mr. Croy tries very gallantly to get behind its overt events, and expose the thoughts and soul states of its people. Some of the character sketches that ensue are by no means without a grim, compelling realism. Bush Higbee, for example, is presented very vividly—the strong, competent man thrown among dolts and cowards, a sort of third-rate Prometheus chained to a manure-pile. Bush, in his way, is the villain of the tale, but most readers, I daresay, will find him the most attractive personage in it. There is something heroic about his patient stalking of the red-cheeked Josie, his gigantic physical energy, his fortitude under adversity. Bush, bathed and curry-combed, would have made an excellent small-town banker, police captain or bootlegger. So, too, old Grandpap Decker is alive—a peasant decayed into the chimney-corner, full of grotesque and unbelievable imbecilities and indecencies. The others, compared to him, fade into flat cut-outs, even including Josie. There is nothing warm and touching about her; she is simply silly; when it is made known that she is with child by the silo agent one laughs, as a shoe-drummer might laugh. She and the rest suffer alike from the author's very defective manage-

ment of his story. It proceeds, not from cause to effect, but by leaps. No step, true enough, is overlooked, but no step is made quite plausible. The thing shows a dreadful drop from the level of "West of the Water Tower."

"Backfurrow" is a first novel by a young man who made a sensation at the University of Michigan, three or four years ago, by denouncing the more preposterous jackasses of the faculty, and calling upon God to save him and his fellows from their pedagogy. His story, I take it, will greatly surprise these learned dunderheads, if they ever venture to read it. There is not the slightest sign of Revolt in it; it preaches neither pacificism nor free love, nor, indeed, anything else; it is wholly free from the musky, levantine smells of Greenwich Village and the Young Intellectuals. All it sets out to do is to describe the life of a poor farmer in central Michigan—and he is, as farmers go, a highly respectable fellow, faithful to his laborious duties and even to his wife. Not an idea, sound or unsound, enters his head from cover to cover. His one aim is to break his recalcitrant acres to his will, to feed his cattle and get his fruit trees started, to accumulate a safe balance of \$300 at the county-seat bank. What gives the story distinction is its extraordinarily vivid presentation of the cruel, back-breaking toil of such a man, his endless days of colossal labor, the harshness of the enemy that he must conquer. Zola, in "La Terre," came near missing all that. He was so engrossed by the drabbing of his peasants that he often forgot their work. Eaton, in "Backfurrow," bears it ever in mind. At times he almost makes Ralph Dutton's weariness contagious; one feels it as one feels the hot glow of the sun that scorches him. Wrecked in the end, he passes out only half a man, and his wife and children shoulder his burdens. There is not much finesse in the story, but it is moving. Few first novels show so much seriousness or so much skill.

"The Spring Flight" is by another debutant, and he, too, is a Michigander. The

contrast with "Backfurrow," at least in matter, is striking, for Kenneth Farr is no groaning plowhand, but a brisk young fellow of the towns, and most of his adventures take place in Detroit, the *Kaiserstadt* of whole herds of Eminentissimos. In brief, the story of a youth who revolts against the cabbagey miasmas of a Christian home, and takes to high hazards of both the spirit and the flesh. The author manages his machinery, particularly at the start, in an extremely dexterous manner. The rebellion of Kenneth is seen clearly to be far less a strike than a lockout. His mother's furious and implacable Methodism simply drives him from the house. If he smokes a cigarette, it is a crime bordering upon arson or mayhem. If he visits in more civilized homes, he is treated like a prodigal returned from dalliance with the Sirens. The land is full of Christian mothers like Mrs. Farr; they keep the bootleggers and brothel-keepers prosperous. Kenneth escapes to a factory, and then to a newspaper office, and by Chapter VIII he is a frequenter of the bar at the Elks' Club and is having a gaudy affair with a romantic servant-girl.

What follows is the story of his oscillations between the natural energy and ambition of a good American and the somewhat banal voluptuousness of an ex-Methodist. It is a story packed with brilliant and searching detail—in fact, an extraordinarily sound and competent piece of work. Kenneth, as the saying goes, leads his own life; he sees all the sights of Detroit, that boozy and bawdy town; his crimes against the Methodist canon multiply until his mother washes her hands of him, and resigns him to the devil. But all the while a sound young man is hidden in his carnal envelope—a young man of no small abilities and with more than a touch of romanticism. The rough adventures of the town do not content him for long; he is soon considering his position and his future, and launching upon a quest for something beyond careless kisses. There are two main love affairs here, and in each there is gen-

uine drama. Twice Kenneth suffers the immemorial agonies of the young. Then comes catastrophe, and after it a quiet gliding into calmer waters. The ending is magnificently ironical. Mamma Farr returns to the scene. The prodigal is forgiven. One looks beyond the curtain into the dull, safe years of his middle age. The rebel is tamed at last. Normalcy, as the late martyr Harding might have said, is his final and supreme commitment.

I can't recall a first novel of more workmanlike dignity. There is absolutely no touch of amateurishness in it. The story moves slowly and yet steadily; it rises to heights of whirling drama; it is packed with pungent observation; its characters are in the round and full of life. It would be absurd to say that it shows merely promise. How many American novelists of twenty years' practice could do a better?

The Infancy of the Race

HUMAN ORIGINS: A MANUAL OF PREHISTORY, by George Grant McCurdy. Two volumes. New York: D. Appleton & Company.

PREHISTORIC MAN: A GENERAL OUTLINE OF PREHISTORY, by Jacques De Morgan. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

THE EARTH BEFORE HISTORY: MAN'S ORIGIN AND THE ORIGIN OF LIFE, by Edmond Perrier. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

THESE are all books of the first importance and value, written by highly competent men and admirably planned. Dr. McCurdy's two stately volumes present the best account of prehistoric man, and by long odds, that has yet got into type in any language; they even supplant the superb "Fossil Men" of Marcellin Boule. The whole field is covered in detail; there are more than 650 illustrations, many of them in color; the materials are so ordered that reference is easy. It would be difficult to imagine a more thorough handling of the subject; if the book has any defect at all, it is that it proceeds too far into minutiae. Ah, that American scholarship in every field were so learned and praiseworthy—especially, say, in philosophy, European