

C. Greene, Perry Miller and Geoffrey Tillotson.

INVOLUNTARY WITNESS, by Joseph Warren Beach. \$1.50. *Macmillan*. This excellent collection of Mr. Beach's more recent poems is based largely on the theme of a passive, "involuntary witness" who is pulled and shaped by the forces of existence. Occasionally, in such poems as "Antipodes" and "Polarity," the poet actively confronts "the most foreign skies" and the "deeper plowing polar antagonisms" of love. All of his poems are written with the same jam and flow of tugging images — "the upward drag of the attic stairs"; "the downward plunge to the dark original" — but the saucy and wry portraits in the final sections give the collection a surprising roundness. Mr. Beach is a strong, true poet and well worth reading.

FICTION

THE PLENIPOTENTIARIES, by H. J. Kaplan. \$3.00. *Harper*. Mr. Kaplan has thinly disguised himself as the garrulous and gossipy Phineas Straus, an elderly writer of Paris letters who sees his fellow American expatriates as ironic exponents of the American Way. His two plenipotentiary friends, the artistic Tony and the political Patricia, are lovers who gain, respectively, wisdom and femininity after a crisscross love affair with a French artist and his wife. This flimsy plot is accompanied, fortunately, by a great deal of good talk from the narrator, Straus-Kaplan: e.g., "each American woman of a certain category must work

out the conditions of her womanhood alone. There is no inherited pattern"; and "Jews are outsiders in America, and yet they are peculiarly American . . . for what is more American than an outsider?" Mr. Kaplan's first novel wobbles along quite well on its wit and charm.

HIGH VALLEY, by Charmian Clift and George Johnston. \$3.00. *Bobbs-Merrill*. This book, which won first prize in the Sydney (Australia) *Morning Herald* novel competition, is an obvious take-off on *Lost Horizon*. In the Valley of the Dreaming Phoenix (Shangri-la) the short glorious summers make up for the long fierce winters. The Chinese boy Salom (Robert Conway), who doesn't belong anywhere because he was raised by Tibetans in Tibet, makes the four-month trip to the valley on a hot tip from an old Chinese peddler. He herds sheep there for the headman, falls in love with his daughter Veshti ("a mouth as rich and red as a peony," "firm, pointed breasts," "the eyes of a gazelle"), and is forced to flee with her when he kills a villainous priest. Next summer, as their naked bodies are dug up out of the snow, the high lama remarks, "They were the *undefeated*." Oddly enough, it all makes for pleasant romantic reading.

HEAVY HANGS THE GOLDEN GRAIN, by Seumas MacManus. \$3.00. *Macmillan*. A rich collection of Irish folklore, from the pen of Seumas MacManus, a fine *shanachie* (story-teller) with a genuine gift for poetic whimsy. His tales, poems and adages are all about

the doings of Raftery, the fiddler; Dark Patrick; the wise wife of Gob-an-Saor; the Love-Talker; the leprechauns; and other old favorites. While spinning an old legend, MacManus handles his "golden grain" with charm. Unfortunately, he also pads it out with a good deal of chaff — bits of pointless legends, weak ballads, and his own clumsy transitional quips, which sound too much like the work of a man who specializes in being Irish.

MISCELLANEOUS

THE SMITHSONIAN, *America's Treasure House*, by Webster Prentiss True. \$3.50. *Sheridan*. Mr. True, with the aid of 64 photographs and a discursive text, takes the reader on a pleasant tour of the ten bureaus which comprise the fabulous Smithsonian Institution. He says it is "primarily a research organization," but proudly cites its collection of 30 million objects, ranging from dinosaurs and shrunken heads to crystal balls and "Botticelli's." If a man "looked at one specimen every minute, eight hours every day, it would take him 170 years to finish the job," he tells us. He also points out that the institute sends expeditions to all corners of the earth, publishes valuable data, runs the Canal Zone Biological Area and studies the sun. A valuable text for all past and future visitors.

HOW TO BUILD A BETTER VOCABULARY, by Maxwell Nurnberg and W. T. Rhodes. \$2.95. *Prentice-Hall*. The purpose of this book is "not only to help you add new words to your vocab-

ulary but to bring into sharp and permanent focus those words that are now on the blurred fringe of your mind." Messrs. Nurnberg and Rhodes carry out this purpose most admirably. Widely read in current literature and journalism, and possessed of lively minds and facility with the English language, they perform virtual magic with several hundreds of words and phrases, making them hop, skip and jump across the page; and if they do not impress these words and phrases permanently upon the readers' minds, it is not their fault. There are many excellent illustrative quotations and line-cuts.

A SECOND TREASURY OF THE FAMILIAR, edited by Ralph L. Woods. \$5.00. *Macmillan*. There are nearly 700 pages of favorite quotations here, from the writings of old and new writers — and from that most prolific writer of all, Anonymous. Shakespeare, Shelley, and Poe are represented, but so are Edgar Guest, F.P.A., and Ernie Pyle. Really first-rate bed-time reading. There is an index of titles and authors.

GEORGIAN LOVE SONGS, edited by John Hadfield. \$7.50. *Cupid Press & the British Book Centre*. There are 100 excellent lyrics here, most of them by minor poets and some anonymous, written between 1714 and 1780. Mr. Hadfield has earned the gratitude of all lovers of poetry by unearthing so many obscure lyrics of such high quality. His brief introduction is admirable. The decorations by Rex Whistler are superb, as is the general bookmanship.