

lic opinion, and public opinion is usually valueless when exact knowledge is required; and facts it too frequently scorns. Mr. Wilson keeps himself cloistered pondering the facts. There is something almost uncanny in the man, in his seclusion, his ear deliberately closed to suggestion, sifting and sorting his facts, working on them as a mathematician would the factors of an equation; balancing, rejecting, eliminating; building up combinations and destroying them; until at last the answer works out, he proves it by his own applied rule, and is certain it is correct. It is one of the mysteries of the man, and I frankly confess that to me the man is a mystery."

It would be unfair to spoil the reader's pleasure in this book, which has all the qualities that can make it interesting. It is informing, it is the revelation of the principles and prejudices of a writer who knows the world, and it supplies that occasional irritation which tempts one irresistibly to a stimulating opposition. And this occasional irritation is not the result of that "certain condescension in foreigners"—for Mr. Low cannot be looked on as a foreigner—but of opinions on political issues that are as fixed as they are deftly expressed. In his sympathies, Mr. Low attracts one; but his antipathies are maddening.

Woodrow Wilson, an Interpretation. By A. Maurice Low. Little, Brown and Co.

MR. OVERTON AS A LITTERATEUR

By Martha Plaisted

There are several surprises in waiting for the person who picks up Mr. Overton's dictionary of national biography which wears the title: "The Women Who Make Our Novels". The first is the rather pleasant discovery that it is not the least like a dictionary. It has, so to speak, no stock definitions, no tags, labels or sewn-in-the-collar markings. "Here are ladies", it seems to say. "They are the

best we have in stock and (if you ask our private opinion) they are quite worth looking over." In pursuance of which sentiment Mr. Overton proceeds to set forth with considerable gusto the not by any means familiar items of interest about thirty-two American women writers.

This figure in itself is a good deal of a surprise. Not that it is surprising to find that there are thirty-two women writers, but that there are thirty-two women of such conspicuous achievement in the field of books irrespective of one's personal likes or dislikes.

To anyone fresh from academic corridors and the sweet poison of "Major English", Mr. Overton will come as a heresiarch bearing twin cups of pain and confusion. As when he says:

There is but one opinion about Edith Wharton's work; it is excellent but lifeless; it is Greek marble with no Pygmalion near. . . . Henry James had a greater gift than Mrs. Wharton and ruined it more completely.

Nor will Mr. Overton entirely get by, even with a more worldly audience, in respect to his attitude toward "Literature". His contention, which extends in a mildly controversial form throughout all the sketches in the book, is that the writer who has delighted vast throngs is more entitled to wear a star in his crown than is the writer who produces a literary masterpiece. Inspired by the glories of the author of "Pollyanna" he writes:

Stand aside, you who are sophisticated, cynical, world-worn or merely flippant! If you could see assembled before you in one vast throng this hundred thousand and tens of thousands more (readers of Pollyanna); if you could see them gathered about you with eager, upturned faces, what would you say? What *could* you say? Do you think your sophistication would be proof against

the expression on those faces? Do you think that *you* could give them what they need? Would your subtleties help them? Would they listen to you and go away a little braver, a little more comforted, a little readier to face life?

Mr. Overton should forbear to use these Ciceronian appeals. The thought is insupportable. The upturned faces of the followers of "Freckles", "Pollyanna", or the latest Workmen and Soldiers' Council would be more than anyone could front with confidence. But what conclusion is to be drawn from that? Suffice it that Mr. Overton has done a most interesting and provocative book—and a useful one. How useful will appear from the following incident:

A clever woman who teaches English in a fashionable city school had been suffering from the parental custom of "lunches to Mary's teacher". At all such ceremonies the opening formality was a discussion of current literature between mother and teacher, daughter listening silently over her soup. The first time it occurred she was taken off her guard.

"Don't you think 'The Heart of Rachel' is the best thing Mrs. Norris has ever done?"

She had not read "The Heart of Rachel".

Another mother banished her daughter from the room. "I do so want to talk to you about books", she said, "but there's nothing printed nowadays that is fit for a pure young girl to read or to hear discussed. I don't even let Kathleen look at the newspapers. Now *what* do you think of 'A Woman of Genius'?"

"I could not solve the problem of these literary ordeals", she said. "If I continued to say 'I have not read it' about every book that was suggested to me, the mother thought me stupid, probably, and unworthy of my pro-

fession. And I was too vain and too fond of the children to suffer myself to be so misjudged. Sometimes, before an imminent occasion, I would subject my spirit to the torture of 'cramming up' on some of the 'latest books'. If only I had had Mr. Overton's book then, I should have risen up and called him blessed."

As far as the writer's knowledge goes, Mr. Overton's book is the first adequate thing of its kind in this country. His friendly, chatty comments on everyone, from Frances Hodgson Burnett to Edith Wharton; his knack of picking out the core of human interest from the life of each; the clever, easy way in which he weaves character and craftsmanship in equal strands to form his fabric—all this makes very enjoyable reading. To use a much abused phrase, but a good one for all that, the human interest of Mr. Overton's book is quite engaging. It is not without significance that there are thirty-two prominent women novelists in the United States. Mr. Overton has made it possible to hold them all in one's hand like royalty in a pack of cards. He places them for us geographically, gives us their traditions and environment, shows how many owe their success to early training in journalism, how many to the fact that they came from well-to-do homes, how many to early struggles with poverty, how many to the tasks of motherhood and home-making.

For all of which one is to be grateful. Mr. Overton is to be read and enjoyed and then controverted, if you please. The enjoyment is certain. For such as dissent from his point of view there remains the perfect answer: "Man liveth not by bread alone". This was uttered of the staff of life itself and not even the works and pomp of

Herbert Hoover have subtracted from its truth.

In any case, read Mr. Overton; in divers instances he is better, as "Literature", than his women novelists.

The Women Who Make Our Novels. By Grant M. Overton. Moffat, Yard and Co.

RECENT BOOKS ON NATURE AND THE RED MAN

By Ernest Thompson Seton

It is difficult to discuss "The Human Side of Animals" seriously or patiently, after reading the main plan and a few of the chapters. Where *did* the writer accumulate such a mass of misinformation?

For instance, in the foreword, he mentions as well-established facts: that skunks lay up stores of paralyzed frogs to feed their young; that bears bury their dead and guard the grave against desecration; that squirrels can foresee hard winters; that apes beat their fellows with sticks; that wolverines drop moss-baits from the trees to lure the deer; that rats lead their blind brothers with sticks.

After this preliminary strain on our credulity, he proceeds to say that "evidently, the zebra is well aware that the black-and-white stripes of his coat take away the sense of solid body", etc. (page 4); that the sable is a native of the "polar regions" (page 5); that the woodchuck "lives in burrows near streams where he can catch fish and small animals" (page 6); that the bison and the buffalo of America are two different animals; that "cows are responsive to certain kinds of music: a funeral march makes them sad, and rag-time so disturbs them that they give but little milk" (page 21); that horns of mountain sheep break from the sheep's heads very easily and furnish dens for

foxes (page 70); that the beaver has a mud-plastering tail (page 153); that beavers are black, white, and brown: "black beavers are best known" (page 153); that the ornithorhynchus is a native of Madagascar (page 164).

The kinship of man and the animals is a well-established, scientific fact. No one seeks more keenly than I do for evidence of the relationship, but a work based on such fables as the foregoing is nothing but a mischief-maker. If the publishers had submitted the manuscript to some reliable naturalist, they certainly would never have published the book.

"Sunset Canada, British Columbia and Beyond" is a copious history and guide-book of British Columbia, by one who is a historian rather than a naturalist.

It is full of good information on the past, present, and future of the west-course province of Canada, all made readable by clever presentation, and finally blessed with a good index, the evidence of an expert recorder.

"Over Indian and Animal Trails" is an interesting evidence of the growing interest in wild life and in the woodcraft of the red man. It is a collection of folk-tales that the scientists may criticize in detail, for there are frequent lapses in natural history that the red man would not have made; such as describing September as the Moon of Falling Leaves. That name belongs to October in all tribes and altitudes of North America. Or, calling the bob-cat "Peekompf"; I do not recollect that name for the bob-cat in any Indian language, though it certainly is the Melecite name for the pekan or fisher. A curious lapse of this kind is making Wabasso, the rabbit, brown, while the snow is on the ground and the ermine is white.