

THE EDITOR RECOMMENDS—

BOOKS THAT MAY HAVE ESCAPED YOU

1. "*Norse Tales*" by Hamilton Wright Mabie—simple retelling of the world's most virile legends.

2. "*The Little Karoo*" by Pauline Smith—as lovely as "*Maria Chapdelaine*"; stories of Dutch Africa.

3. "*Criticism*" by W. C. Brownell—a short essay by the stylist; illuminating and valuable.

4. "*The White Company*" by A. Conan Doyle—one of the best of historical romances.

5. "*Adrienne Toner*" by Anne Douglas Sedgwick—a better story even than "*The Little French Girl*".

From the Nineties

THE opening sentence of Robert Morss Lovett's "Edith Wharton" (McBride) reads: "The decade of the 1890's in England has a definitely marked character." Of the early years of this period and those just preceding it, you will find a vivid and stimulating account in Osbert Burdett's "The Beardsley Period" (Boni, Liveright). There is much good writing in this book. Paragraph after paragraph demands quotation. I like this one:

Queen Victoria's triumph was unparalleled, for she ruled not only the waves but the Muses; and east and west had met at her footstool. Queen Elizabeth, and doubtless other sovereigns, had inspired allegory and flattery, but she inspired solemn oburgation and religious hymns, not in honour of herself, of course, but in honour of the duty and responsibility of which she was the symbol and trustee. These had traditional forms for the awe that they must excite, but that the people's own heart should find spontaneous and dignified expression for them was immensely gratifying.

To return to Mrs. Wharton, Mr. Lovett was perhaps not a perfect choice as a critic of one whose social ideals he could not acclaim, yet he has written what seems to me one of the best critical brochures of the past few years. It is a far better performance than Carl Van Doren's "Cabell" in the same series. He gives not only a fine study of Mrs. Wharton's writing but a picture en route of the woman as well—not, perhaps, in terms of personality but in a rarely interpretative way. Mr. Lovett should write oftener in this vein. His book is excellent reading as well as a clear text for students of this most revered of our women novelists.

A Superb Analysis

IN his second novel Cyril Hume has written a far better book than his "Wife of the Centaur". "Cruel Fellowship" (Doran) was a difficult book for anyone to write; particularly, perhaps, for a young man. Yet he has taken the story of Claude Fisher and made it dramatic, moving, and profound. His detachment in drawing an amazingly clear portrait is not the least part of it. He does not argue for or against the character of Fisher. He simply shows him to us—a naked human soul, for better or for worse. Claude Fisher's life is a series of disasters, vivid and startling contacts with problems of life which must be faced even by those whose equipment is not adequate for the struggle. For a change, we have an absolutely normal attitude brought to bear upon the

abnormal. Yet with what tenderness Hume manages to survey human weakness. He is never contemptuous of his hero — nor does he ever glorify his faults. It is not without reason that he has chosen the Fates as a symbol throughout his story. He has tried to write with the impartiality of fate and he has succeeded brilliantly. The story is told through the eyes of a third person. To some this may seem an awkward method. To me it simply emphasized the fine abstraction of the telling. The humanity of this book should make it widely read. How terribly true it is, only its readers can know. It proves to me that in Hume we have a novelist of distinction and rare artistry. At an early age, a novelist of mature power.

Spring Essays

WITH the exception of "Skyline Promenades" (Knopf), there is no reason for calling this group of books spring essays except that they were published in the spring. As to the "Promenades", seldom has a book of essays seemed to me to have so much real charm and quality as these accounts of mental and physical wanderings among the mountains by J. Brooks Atkinson. Perhaps that is because a real vacation means for me a walking trip with some such companion as the author of these philosophizings. Someone to cut one's most remote moods, to bring one to earth with a bang, yet who can swing a pack and appreciate a view. You will find much about literature as well as about nature in this book, and much about life, too. Mr. Atkinson is contemplative and kindly. He can be sharp, too. I like what he has to say about city dwellers:

When enemies thus become more numerous than friends, and when even friendship sometimes fails under the stress of competition, it is natural that city life should breed the twin evils, Suspicion and Distrust. The city-dweller views with suspicion some of those he knows and most of those whom he does not know but merely reads about. At great cost to himself, alas! sometimes at the cost of his spiritual life, he has forced open the door of a house where he may live. Those whom fortune has placed in a position to thrust him out again he views with alarm. He makes friends only with those who are social equals, and affects an unctuous camaraderie towards his superiors. In those who are unlike him, who perchance profess a different religion or wear turbans instead of derbies, he has no confidence. Them he suspects of insidious rivalry, of coveting his markets; he distrusts their professions of faith because he knows his own to be false. Then war, "the purifier and the pestilence", breaks out. Even those in whose faces competition has left hard lines quaver at the cost, and to ease their distressed minds, give war a holy purpose, "descant on its vivifying virtues", and with renewed vigour invoke the divine mercy while they trample divine precepts under foot. In time the war is won or lost. But suspicion still remains.

William McFee's "Swallowing the Anchor" (Doubleday, Page) has in it some of his very best essays. To be sure, he seems at times to be a trifle didactic but, in the main, he is the same kindly, wise, amusing, philosophizing gentleman of the sea that he always was. Is it natural that I should like best the essays he wrote for this magazine? Perhaps my weakness is a human one. I do maintain, however, that "A Letter in Reply to a Young Gentleman of Yale University" is a masterpiece of wisdom and friendliness. This is a book which I can recommend with complete heartiness.

Virginia Woolf is a stylist of note. Her novel, "Mrs. Dalloway", published recently, has received high and merited praise. Her essays in "The Common Reader" (Harcourt, Brace) are even finer. She might well have dared call her book "The Uncommon

Reader". There is a splendid series called "The Lives of the Obscure". There is a subtle piece "On Not Knowing Greek". There is a masterly study of George Eliot and one of Montaigne. To any lover of essays these three books should prove a rare treat.

Two Arresting Novels

GEORGE LOOMS writes well. "The Caraways" (Doubleday, Page) is his best novel so far, and it is a good piece of work. The story is interesting, the characterization good. John Caraway is a proud figure, and one beautifully drawn — vigorous, true, another of these business men with a soul. His business deals, his affairs of the heart, his friendship for and his dealings with Abner Poteet, the minister, are all real and all interesting. The latter half of the book, concerning the life of his illegitimate son, is less convincing but it all holds. As a realistic novel, "The Caraways" is good and it is absorbing. Its only lack is poetry of movement, flow of plot. It has in abundance the qualities which "Ethan Quest" (Cosmopolitan), another novel by a young man, lacks; but, on the other hand, "Ethan Quest" has those very qualities which would make "The Caraways" a better, perhaps even a great book. Nothing could make "Ethan Quest" a great book. It is mushy. Harry Hervey showed in his earlier books that he had an indubitable feeling for romance. He understands the longing of the human heart for strange scenes, the lure of the East to the office bound soul. Once you have overcome your dislike of his lush phrases and his curiously maudlin psychology, you

read his book with much interest. Ethan, like so many young men with poetic instincts, leaves his wife and goes off in search of something better in the way of an ideal. Ethan dreams his way through oriental ports until he succumbs to disease in the rôle of a pseudo-Hawaiian balladist. I quote gladly a paragraph from page 326:

And the voices mocked: "You've gone far! Just a step beyond that is True Artistry — and madness! The madness of Schopenhauer, of Wagner, of Gauguin! But that's the joke. You'll never reach it. Few will."

Humor: British and Native

RING LARDNER'S latest book of essays, sketches, and what not contains several masterpieces of humor. Take the title story "What of It?" (Scribner). There is mystery, tragedy, and much laughter in the idea of choosing a title for a play — and Mr. Lardner has captured it all. He flays for all time the absurdities of business formulæ with the squib "'In Conference'", and there is a rattling good bit called "Business is Business". I am inclined to think, however, that a book made up of such miscellaneous pieces is a mistake.

The farcical novel, "A Cuckoo in the Nest" (Doubleday, Page), may mark the advent of another P. G. Wodehouse. Perhaps Ben Travers will learn in time to avoid elaborate Britishisms. At any rate, he writes nonsense well, and there are many laughs in this story of an estranged couple. Far be it from me to complain of such things in an Englishman, but Mr. Travers seems to me occasionally a trifle forced and — very occasionally — a trifle vulgar.

— J. F.

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

By Irwin Edman

ONE approaches a work entitled "The Creative Spirit" with something of misgiving. Under the protection of that beautiful phrase there has been too often, to quote a phrase also quoted by Mr. Brown, "the shimmer of high aspiration and extraordinary nonsense". In the name of that seductive ideal there has been a vast amount of foolish sentimentalism and of footless ecstasy. Mr. Brown's book is nothing of the sort. It is an extraordinarily sensible and solid inquiry into the conditions of American life which make for and against that spontaneous and self disciplined adventure we call creative activity.

In his introductory chapter Mr. Brown indulges in a procedure that might well be more often followed by those high priests of unction who talk loosely and breathlessly about the mysteries of art — he makes perfectly clear just what he is talking about. In prose which, if not distinguished, is distinguished by impeccable clarity, Mr. Brown reminds us what creative activity is, and in what sense it is life most alive. We are creative — and happy — in those moments and those doings when we are spontaneously and significantly reshaping things, situations, and our own emotions into something fresh and original, and something bearing, so to put it, our own signature. It is the kind of activity precisely the opposite of that illustrated by a machine. In his analysis Mr. Brown emphasizes the element of emotional verve which is the origin, the intellec-

tual freshness which is the essence, and the spontaneous glow which accompanies and is the reward of creative action.

In so far as we are heightened and inventive in our doings — whether in industry, art, or social relations — we are artists. And, as Mr. Brown points out, only in so far as we have that heightening and inventiveness in our actions have we anything resembling positive and continual happiness. That touch of freedom and originality which is the mark of genius exists, to some degree, in all except imbeciles. But that potential electric of the spirit demands healthy conditions for its release, and where there is no release or opportunity there is frustration and spiritual death.

Mr. Brown's inquiry is twofold. He makes clear that life is fruitful and rewarding only where its temper is creative, and he finds American institutions by and large guilty of stifling such life. He begins with the church. Religion, through the ministry of the church, might contribute to the quickening of emotion, the revelation of new depths, the incitement to new reaches and new adventures of the spirit. But the church, like any other institution, has become professional, standardized, and institutional. The church building which might be a tangible and vivifying house of beauty is too often a drab meeting house. The minister who might be an interpreter and awakener of the life of the spirit has become an official, a lecturer and a social lion. The same is true of education. The teacher has become in most of our colleges and universities a