

THE EDITOR RECOMMENDS —

BOOKS THAT MAY HAVE ESCAPED YOU

1. "*Dracula*" by Bram Stoker (Doubleday, Page). One of the best horror and mystery stories ever written. Surely you haven't missed it.

2. "*Beggars of Life*" by Jim Tully (A. and C. Boni). These autobiographical sketches of hobo life are packed with drama and sentiment.

3. "*The Dominant Blood*" by Robert E. McClure (Doubleday, Page). A quiet, normal novel of a not-so-much-shouted-about side of the younger generation.

4. "*Through the Wheat*" by Thomas Boyd (Scribner). This great American war book shall be mentioned here until every reader of THE BOOKMAN owns it.

5. "*Bare Souls*" by Gamaliel Bradford (Houghton Mifflin). The best of a long line of good books from a fine American author is this collection of historical portraits.

Will Irwin Rides a Fine Steed

THE western novel in many forms embroiders and infests our national literature. "The Virginian" is still read with joy. Zane Grey is more vital than most people suppose. Herbert Quick and Emerson Hough have written books with a good deal of quality. Not since "The Virginian", though, has a story of mining camp, posse, and quick shooting so thrilled me as does Will Irwin's "Youth Rides West" (Knopf). It is the story of a Harvard boy in the Seventies who goes west to seek his fortune and finds wealth and love among the mountains. In plot it is conventional, in tone melodramatic; but it is so cleverly

constructed, its details and its descriptions are so amassed, that without the creaks usual in an historical novel this golden, daring period is reconstructed with something like perfection. It reminds one of Defoe, this writing. It is good. At times description becomes really beautiful, but it never clogs the progress of the story. Characters are drawn with color and humor, yet they likewise never hold up the swift narration. This is a good yarn, embroidered by fine writing. Buck Hayden, Charlie Meek, Marcus Handy, Town Marshal McGrath — a fistful of characters that are memorable. All the stock incidents of western novels are here, yet how unimportant becomes the fact that they have been used before. It must be admitted that when Mr. Irwin comes to a love scene he stutters a trifle, but that's a minor difficulty; although love is the concern of the final page, "Youth Rides West" is primarily a tale of escape and adventure.

A Satirist and a Mystic

PERHAPS it is fortunate that Leonard Bacon, Ph.D., retired from the teaching profession before the publication of his latest satirical poem. The author of "Ulug Beg" has a vicious and a sure pen. "Ph.D.s: Male and Female Created He Them" (Harper) is one (or rather two) of the few really funny poems published in English in the last decade. Here is the essence of academe: the trials and tribulations of midnight oil, the flutterings of feminine postgraduate students, the ardors and

endurances of musty shelves and vaulted halls. All, all are here! Sophia Trenton, heroine of "A Moral Poem", is unusually appealing:

She was not like a flower (my heroines
Are painted as a homely muse dictates),
Nor wicked as the seven deadly sins,
Nor the sweetest of girl undergraduates.
Nor was she one with ruthless hand that
spins
The twisted thread of other people's fates.
Frankly in talents, as in form and face,
Sophia was a little commonplace.

The second poem is a monument of tragic woe. In the byways and lanes of early English are encountered many an event of ironical import. Take this stanza on the study of "Beowulf" — what could be more trenchant?

Oh, wherefore art thou Beowulf? I wonder.
Nameless barbaric bard, what have you
wrought?
Pithecantropic semi-epic blunder,
Here and there sullied by a human
thought,
Or fancy fainting 'mid dull blood and
thunder,
Feeble, but to the reader overfraught
Like beauty almost, as he plods rebellious,
Cursing the flame that spared Cotton
Vitellius.

If you enjoy good satirical verse, you will find both "Ulug Beg" and this latest production of Mr. Bacon's indispensable.

A marked contrast is Robert P. Tristram Coffin's "Christchurch" (Seltzer). No one in America, with the possible exception of Thomas Jones, has written lyrics that compare with these in their quality of reverence and mystic vision. "Monks of Mona" is an exquisite piece of writing — visionary, musical, fine. "Lindisfarne" has ballad quality, and lyric beauty as well — a rare combination. Perhaps one legitimate criticism of a beautiful book is the use of similar rhythms in too many poems; but this is a small matter when the beauty of the

whole is considered. "Good Friday Song" has a quaintness that I like. Listen to the cadences in this final stanza:

Good folk all, pray heed my call.
The resurrection glory
Is now at hand in every land,
I sing its holy story.
Christ has won — who'll have a bun? —
So let the world sing glee,
He lives, He lives, and promise gives
Of life eternally!
*One-a-penny,
Two-a-penny,
Hot-cross buns!*

Jeweled Prose

WILLIAM CAXTON, the printer, was also translator, and in the course of his translating he turned into English prose from a French source (he was probably not an expert Latinist) "Ovyde Hys Booke of Methamorphose", that naive and beautiful collection of legendry to which, as source material, literature owes many great debts. Basil Blackwell, publisher to the Shakespeare Head Press of Stratford-upon-Avon, has printed it luxuriously from the manuscript in the Pepysian Library at Magdalene College. His edition is limited to 375 copies. Houghton Mifflin have a certain number to distribute in America. Many limited editions are, frankly, bores. Here is one, however, that is beautiful and, to any lover of literary curiosities, invaluable. Only books X-XV of the "Methamorphose" exist in this translation. The first nine were lost; but the six here presented are well worth owning. Caxton's English is not really difficult. Although weakened occasionally by French influence, it yet conveys these simple stories with grace and strength. This is a dignified and carefully wrought work.

Conrad, Conrad and Hueffer, Hueffer

"THE Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad" have been issued as a volume: eight stories between rich blue covers (Doubleday, Page). An excellent preface by the late master explains the collection. Partly, it says:

It would have been misleading to label those productions as sea tales. They deal with feelings of universal import, such for instance as the sustaining and inspiring sense of youth, or the support given by a stolid courage which confronts the unmeasurable force of an elemental fury simply as a thing that has got to be met and lived through with professional constancy. Of course there is something more than mere ideas in those stories. I modestly hope that there are human beings in them, and also the articulate appeal of their humanity so strangely constructed from inertia and restlessness, from weakness and from strength and many other interesting contradictions which affect their conduct, and in a certain sense are meant to give a colouring to the actual events of the tale, and even to the response which is expected from the reader. To call them "studies of seamen" would have been pretentious and even misleading, in view of the obscurity of the individuals and the private character of the incidents. "Shorter Tales" is yet the best title I can think of for this collection. It commends itself to me by its non-committal character which will neither raise false hopes nor awaken blind antagonisms.

We can then read, or reread, these great narratives. What an atmosphere of the supernatural is achieved in "The Secret Sharer", with implements only of the natural! "To-Morrow", pitiful, terrible, totally insane, is another masterpiece of technique. "Typhoon", one of the greatest storm pieces ever written, contrasts strangely with the rather ordinary but nevertheless effective measures of "Because of the Dollars". From these great stories it is disillusioning to turn to the maunderings of "The Nature of a Crime" (Doubleday, Page) by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford (Huef-

fer). This piece, republished from an almost forgotten time of their collaboration, remains uninteresting to me, except as a literary experiment. The new editor of "The Transatlantic Review" has, however, written a biography that is arresting and illuminating in his "Joseph Conrad: a Personal Remembrance" (Little, Brown). He has given us a record of a personality which has seldom been equaled as interpretative biography. Conrad becomes real both as person and as writer. So, too, unfortunately, does Hueffer, who, fine writer that he is, allows an unpleasant egotism, difficult to analyze, to cloud the perfection of his portrait of collaborator and friend. For the writer or student of writing perhaps there can be no better textbook than this. It reveals a man immensely concerned with words as words, as instruments of beauty, as portrayals of character. Much of the book is a discussion of writing rather than of actual biographical details. A collaborator has a peculiar knowledge of the man with whom he works. Mr. Ford has used this advantage to the full. The result is an acute study of the writing man. I like this paragraph, which might well occupy an evening's discussion for any spinners of yarns:

We used to say that a passage of good style began with a fresh, usual word, and continued with fresh, usual words to the end; there was nothing more to it. When we felt that we had really got hold of the reader, with a great deal of caution we would introduce a word not common to a very limited vernacular, but that only very occasionally. Very occasionally indeed; practically never. Yet it is in that way that a language grows and keeps alive. People get tired of hearing the same words over and over again. . . . It is again a matter for compromise.

— J. F.

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

DEUCES WILD IN THE SPRING FICTION

By Isabel Paterson

THE advance guard of novels of 1925 seem inclined to march in pairs, as if wanting the reassurance of company before facing the redoubtable indifference of the public. Not that they would exhibit any grave concern as to what one may think of them; they strive for insouciance, but the tentative note can be discerned. They neither admonish nor uplift, commenting aloofly upon the oddities of animate nature, especially that curious creature who calls himself Man. Life, they would say, is a queer business, but you must take it or leave it, for you can't stop it or change its course. The best thing, then, is to stand aside and smile.

In this chance haul of the dragnet, there are two satires, two family chronicles, a very remotely related brace of national or racial exhibits, and an odd one, an international exhibit.

We may as well swallow the bitter pill first, reserving the jam for consolation. But since Miss Macaulay's tonic is sugared with tolerant amusement, it goes down most easily. It is an antidote to Victorianism, containing a salutary reminder that we may have achieved a distinction without a difference in our Georgian emancipation. If the Victorians were self righteous, aren't we a little smug in our superiority to those benighted creatures?

The plot belongs to the great universal stock; Miss Macaulay helps herself to it gracefully. She premises that in 1855 there sailed from England a ship-

load of some forty orphan children of tender years, London waifs philanthropically destined for San Francisco under the ægis of a virtuous maiden lady of the Anglican persuasion, a clergyman's daughter. Miss Charlotte Smith had all the prejudices proper to her social status. A decent Scots-woman had been brought as a nurse. The ship's doctor was Irish, bibulous, Rabelaisian, and a Roman Catholic. The ship was wrecked in the lee of a fertile and uninhabited South Sea Island.

Seventy years later a rescue party arrived. They found that the orphans had thrived and multiplied, preserving in their island home an undiluted mid-Victorian atmosphere. Miss Smith, aged ninety eight, was a reduced but still majestic replica of the late dear Queen. The social, political, and economic problems of the tight little island had reproduced themselves with the same grotesque fidelity. If the microcosm is funny, the author implies, what of the original? And if they were funny, what of ourselves? How shall we look to our grandchildren? It is all done in good humor, with a touch of broad comedy for a high light in the distressing circumstances of Miss Smith's marriage. She had been deceived by the doctor; he had a wife in Ireland. Miss Smith never knew it until she had borne ten children in this bigamous union; and she kept the secret thereafter, reacting to her hidden shame by a more rigid respectability in law making. Illegitimacy she would not tolerate. On principle she was also a teetotaler, though she fuddled herself on palm wine with great dignity, calling