

IN BRIEF REVIEW

BACKSTAIRS gossip has come to have an acknowledged place in the publishing world. All lists have at least one of this type of book. As such works go, "The Queen of Cooks and Some Kings" (Boni, Liveright) is decidedly not of the worst. It has the advantage, for one thing, of being largely true; for another, of being written in one of the most delightful styles known: that of conversation. Mrs. Lewis merely told all about herself and her life to Miss Lawton and a stenographer, and the verbatim result is this book. Like all of its type, it is singularly useless, but it has the real advantage of adding another vital character to the small list of the world's literary individualists. Mrs. Lewis herself will be what will make the book sell — not her vapid revelations of how she shooed Winston (Copper Top) Churchill from the kitchen, or how a New York Jew was thrown into the gutter for not taking off his hat when he spoke to her. Not that these incidents do not have their charm! But the delightful and valuable thing in the book is the revelation of Mrs. Lewis herself: a woman of great personal magnetism, it seems, yet of consummate impudence and plenty of kitchen vulgarity. The faults of the book are many. Inveterate repetition, vapid moralizing, absolute formlessness in narrative: these are merely a few of the greater of them. Some would consider Mrs. Lewis's egotism a fault. I, however, think it delightful. And it is the force and vitality of herself which makes this book — or at least the first half of it — well worth reading (if you have any time to waste!). The second

part adds nothing of value to the picture. The book is well illustrated with photographs of royalty, subroyalty, actors, statesmen, and Mrs. Rosa Lewis.

There is something earthy and artless in Scots vernacular poetry, a quality that appears all too seldom in our own native verse. Robert Frost and the poets who, consciously or unconsciously, follow in his steps, often attain this pastoral simplicity. But the Scotch seriousness and stoicism is so racially set that no other national poetry can ever quite approach its peculiar idiom. And one must be a Scot to love this rich and rumbling dialect, to feel its burr and appreciate the quaint localisms that distinguish it. In an excellent and scholarly introduction to "The Northern Muse" (Houghton Mifflin) John Buchan, compiler of this anthology of Scots vernacular poems, describes their development, pointing out that neither Burns nor other great Scots bards wrote in the living speech of their countrymen, but used an exotic combination of expressions. It is this fact which makes the appreciation of Scots poetry largely a literary matter. In an effort to bring together the many variations of dialect, mood, and manner, Mr. Buchan has selected from many sources poems from ancient to modern times. At the end of the book a copious commentary elucidates for the reader many unusual words and phrases. Though we are often bored by an anthologist's habit of classifying poems under such heads as "Nature", "Youth and Spring", etc., we cannot help liking some of the titles that this particular compiler chooses. We have

a notion that even the poets themselves would not object to having their pieces classified under "Lacrimæ Rerum", "Friendly Beasts", "Enchantments", and "The Human Comedy".

The habit of writing to newspapers is not something peculiar to our day; it was a popular practice also during the Revolutionary period. Particularly was it true of American colonists and Englishmen temporarily sojourning in the States, and certain English newspapers and periodicals frequently printed these communications "in large type". Margaret Wheeler Willard (Houghton Mifflin) has been through the files of these British journals and offers in "Letters on the American Revolution, 1774-1776" a judicious selection which is both interesting and informative. She has also exhumed illuminating bits of private correspondence which throw light on the sentiment that prevailed in America during those critical days. To the publishers, Houghton Mifflin Company, belongs credit for the production of one of the most artistic volumes we have seen in many a day.

In these days of repression of educational honesty, why is such a book as "Horace and His Art of Enjoyment" proffered to tempt us? Even E. P. Dutton and Company and Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, professor of Latin in Vassar College, the two conspirators affording us this unwelcome book, must know by this time that acquaintance with the ancient world is become heretical, must admit the unorthodoxy of everything now not purely vocational in our present jazz world of higher culture — and should have resisted this unusual blandishment of the Devil. What boots it that a once loved poet-philosopher here lives again,

even dubiously in somewhat stilted gear; that Roman life once more passes here in pageantry; that one Sabine farm calls *Carpe diem* again? Surely it is wrong nowadays to be of the Cyrenaics, the Cynics, the Academics, Peripatetics, the Stoics, or the Epicureans! Out with 'em all, and be a Fundamentalist, and a Goose-Stepper — in any event, a Lock-Stepper!

Mrs. Eliza Fay, whose "Original Letters from India, 1779-1815" (Harcourt, Brace) are now published for the first time outside of that mysterious state, with introductory and terminal notes by E. M. Forster, must have been a most extraordinary character. Her letters, which are really an autobiography, describe her experience with the "pagans" not only in India, but in Egypt as well; her viewpoints are unforgettable, likewise her style. She is tremendously alive, even today, through the vitality of her writings, always personal, always pointed. Incidentally, she was a prisoner of the famous Hyder Ally, against whom the English waged war; yet while the letters describing her experiences are of considerable value historically, the main interest lies in the very human person, Eliza Fay, who triumphed over difficulties, and told the world what she thought.

The reputation of George Saintsbury as learned and urbane critic is already well established. The fourth volume of his "Collected Essays and Papers, 1875-1923" (Dutton), which contains those on French literature, merely reaffirms, therefore, his breadth of scholarship and his peculiar insight into the Gallic mind. His tribute to Gautier is appropriate for himself: "one of the rare critics who . . . submit themselves to the effects of art; who