

one of them, of course, is a story about François Villon. They range farther geographically than they do mentally, and the most interesting result of reading them is an impression that the young of Richmond, of Harvard, of Utah, and of Colorado must be very much alike — that is, they must have read very much the same books.

The Best Short Stories of 1925. Edited by Edward J. O'Brien. Small, Maynard and Company.

O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1925. Doubleday, Page and Company.

"The World's" Best Short Stories of 1925. George H. Doran Company.

The Best French Stories of 1925. Edited by Richard Eaton. Small, Maynard and Company.

The Best Continental Stories of 1925. Edited by Richard Eaton. Small, Maynard and Company.

29 Love Stories Old and New. By Twenty and Nine Authors. Edited by Ernest Rhys and C. A. Dawson-Scott. D. Appleton and Company.

Great Short Stories of the World. Selected by Barrett H. Clark and Maxim Lieber. Robert M. McBride and Company.

Tales of Terror. Edited by Joseph L. French. Small, Maynard and Company.

The Best College Stories of 1924-1925. Edited by Henry C. Schnittkind and Horace C. Baker. The Stratford Company.

HAVE WE PROGRESSED?

By Woodbridge Riley

THE effect of these two books is like a seidlitz powder, the pessimistic blue and the optimistic white resulting in an interesting effervescence. Spengler's "The Decline of the West" has made a great hit in Germany as the most ponderous of those books on "Why we lost the war". It is an enormous and fantastic rationalization of an inferiority complex. The theme is practically this: "We are down and out. How explain it?" Of course the Fatherland was not to blame for the

war, but that exhausting conflict was only one symptom of the general anæmia of European civilization. The real reason was in no way the ambitions of the Kaiser and his crew, but the fact that the West was "metaphysically exhausted", for there is a morphology of world history, and the West-European-American civilization follows the general biological archetype of birth, maturity, and old age. This, then, gives depth and significance to "the first venture in all time" in predetermining history. "Hitherto", says the author, "the possibility of solving a problem so far-reaching has evidently never been envisaged, and even if it had been so, the means of dealing with it were altogether unsuspected or, at best, inadequately used."

Spengler's book is fascinating in its hypothesis, but disregards facts in the history of thought. By suppressing those opinions which do not agree with his theory Spengler obtains the results he looks for. Thus he claims that the Greeks had little notion of time and were not interested in the past; they lived only for the present and had no conception of the lapse of the ages. The contrary is the truth. One of the Pre-Socratics, Xenophanes, observed fossil fish and from that drew correct inferences as to the rise and fall of the land in ages past. Next Parmenides was greatly concerned with the vast processes of "Becoming". Pythagoras was enamored of the circle as perfect because it never ends, while Plato's chief problem was to prove the existence of the celestial archetypes, of patterns eternal in the heavens. The greater Greek philosophers assuredly possessed the sense of time, and Zeno raised questions as to its infinite divisibility which still puzzle many.

However, Spengler is right in saying that classical antiquity as a whole had

little conception of the vast stretches of history. To them the span of terrestrial life was comparatively brief, and, by the time of Lucretius, in the first century before our era, the drama of old earth seemed drawing to its close after a brief maturity and a golden age of youth, of which tradition still preserved memories.

The very documents of antiquity flatly contradict the statements of Spengler that classical culture possessed no memory, no organ of history, in this special sense, and that "the pure present, whose greatest symbol is the Doric column, in itself predicates the negation of time". Alongside this curious analogy Spengler puts another of contrary meaning: namely, that the Egyptians embalmed even their own history as shown in the mummy, symbol of an enormous past and of the will to endure into the future. This contention seems to contradict a further statement that ancient man formed no image of the world in progress and that men of the Western culture alone possessed a knowledge in which "world history" is so potent a form of waking consciousness. At this point Spengler adds a statement characteristic of Teutonic *Kultur*. He says that among the Western peoples it was the Germans who discovered the mechanical clock, the great symbol of the flow of time. But the history of science declares it was Galileo who invented the mechanical clock and that the first diagrams of the working of the pendulum were those of the great Italian.

Spengler seems as untrustworthy in his statements regarding concrete facts as in his statements regarding abstract theories such as the lack of time sense among the Greeks. Thus he later declares that Napoleon gained his imperialistic ideas from Cromwell, whereas the French historians say that

even before he was first consul Bonaparte was infatuated with the career of Julius Cæsar. Why should Spengler have made such a curious comparison between the Corsican adventurer and the Puritan Protector? It is perhaps a case of *strafing* the English. The argument seems to be this: Napoleon's empire once included Germany. Napoleon got his ideas from England. Therefore England was to blame for the conquest of the German state.

An even more curious case is Spengler's statement that Darwin's book on "Rainworms" (it should properly be "earthworms") was an attempt to bolster up the English democracy. Evidently Spengler has a low idea of the proletariat. Emerson once suggested that the worm might aspire to be man, but it was only the Puritans who referred to man as a worm.

Spengler's symbolism would form a fascinating study for the psychoanalyst. As an example take this passage, evidently literally translated:

Endless Becoming is comprehended in the idea of *Motherhood*, Woman as Mother is Time and is Destiny. Just as the mysterious act of depth-experience fashions, out of sensation, extension and world, so through Motherhood the bodily man is made an individual member of this world, in which thereupon he has a Destiny. All symbols of Time and Distance are also symbols of maternity. Care is the root-feeling of future, and all care is motherly. It expresses itself in the formation and the idea of Family and State and in the principle of Inheritance which underlies both. Care may be either affirmed or denied — one can live care-filled or care-free. Similarly, Time may be looked at in the light of the instant, and the drama of begetting and bearing or the drama of the nursing mother with her child may be chosen as the symbol of Life to be made apprehensible by all the means of art. India and the Classical took the first alternative, Egypt and the West the second. There is something of pure unrelated present in the Phallus and the Lingam, and in the phenomenon of the Doric column and the Attic statue as well. But the nursing mother points into the future, and she is just the figure that is entirely missing in the Classical art.

It is a relief to turn from this fantastic and somewhat decadent volume to Joseph McCabe's "1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress". The title is perhaps exaggerated but the text is not. In a series of statistical chapters the author contends that "in plain and indisputable arithmetic it can be shown that in the creation and distribution of wealth, the improvement of the lot of the mass of the people, the multiplication of comforts and luxuries and entertainments, the education of the race, the reduction of crime, the elimination of pain and disease, and the production and diversification of food, we have made more progress in one hundred years than had previously been made in the whole era of civilization." This contention is upheld by a quoted question from Professor Millikan: "Do you realize that within the life-time of men now living, within a hundred years, or a hundred and thirty years at the most, all the material conditions under which man lives his life on this earth have been more completely revolutionized than during all the ages of recorded history which preceded? My great-grandfather lived essentially the same kind of life, so far as external conditions were concerned, as did his Assyrian prototype 6,000 years ago."

McCabe contends that despite the world war we can answer this question in the affirmative, and that in the face of pessimists like Bertrand Russell in his "Icarus", Professor Schiller in his "Tantalus", Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton in their desire to return to the "wonderful" thirteenth century, and Bernard Shaw in his "Back to Methuselah".

The task is no light one. This generation has seen much of battle, murder, and sudden death, but as a matter of fact it appears as if the "good old

times" - of a century ago with their filth, poverty, vice, cruelty to children, and general callousness were much worse than now. The newspapers of today make painful reading, but that is nothing to the journals and gazettes of 1825 and thereabouts. It is on materials like these and upon available statistics that McCabe makes a really strong case, if not for optimism, yet at least for what George Eliot was wont to call meliorism.

The Decline of the West. By Oswald Spengler. Alfred A. Knopf.
1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress. By Joseph McCabe. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

DIVERS RUMINATIONS

By John Drinkwater

IF "Discursions" is not wholly a good book, it is a book rich in good things. Our complaint is, and we will make it and have done with it, that Mr. Sitwell for want of a little care has cheated us of the complete satisfaction that we feel ought to have been ours. A man who can write as well as he usually does should never let his readers down by writing badly. All good writing is style, but we feel of some good writers more than others that style is their especial gift, and Mr. Sitwell is one of these. His eager, witty, courageous mind is not intent on philosophical discovery, but it is happily employed in formulating impressions of men, places, and art in the terms of a vivid and engaging personality. And this personality is engaging and vivid precisely because it has this rare quality of style. For good or for bad, and we think it is decidedly for good, Mr. Sitwell is a writer with an air, and when he forgets his artificial grace he is apt to become confused or flat.