

(Continued from page XXII)

bonnets to bees, from the woman's club movement to subsidizing authors.

In his richly varied miscellany of short essays, dialogues, satirical observations on native phenomena, personages and events, reviews of recent books and plays, "Read America First" (Harcourt, Brace), Robert Littell depicts our contemporary life with trenchant and agreeable humor. Avoiding the temptation inherent in most of his subjects to attack with a bludgeon, the author either analyzes them with level tempered tolerance or burlesques them hilariously. A fundamental soundness of thought and freshness of viewpoint prevail in nearly every article in the book. Its contents originally appeared in "The New Republic", of which periodical Mr. Littell is an associate editor.

In his "Causes and Their Champions" (Little, Brown), M. A. DeWolfe Howe, winner of the Pulitzer biography prize in 1924 with his life of Barrett Wendell, and later arranger of Mrs. James T. Field's "Memories of a Hostess", proves once more his partiality for drawing rooms, élite crusaders, schoolmarms, and small talk. Not that Phillips Brooks, Clara Barton, Frances E. Willard, Susan B. Anthony, Booker T. Washington, Woodrow Wilson, Samuel Gompers, even "the Rockefellers" themselves, aren't just as worthy of thumbnail psychographies as more outwardly damaged souls. *Why not?* At any rate, undeviating regard for religion, Red Cross work, prohibition (theoretically), equal suffrage, race sufferance (or better), Wilsonian idealism, labor itself, and money demand our listing of them when they comprise the table of contents of the book at hand.

Bonnie Prince Charlie is the subject of Winifred Duke's addition to the ranks of fictional biography — or, if you will, biographical fiction — in "Heir to Kings" (Stokes). Occasionally she models her style too obviously on the Strachey-Guedalla model, and here she falls short; she lacks the sharp, incisive quality of these men. Where she is successful is in the spinning of a good yarn, the creation of a swaggering, romantic

atmosphere with a distinctly masculine flavor, and in the achievement of a style that is both facile and robust.

Those who were entertained by the Chattertonian pseudo-memoirs of a Georgian young lady of fashion will find them, if anything, less racy, less characteristic, than the genuine reminiscences contained in "The Diaries of a Duchess" (Doran), authentic recollections of a gay eighteenth century wearer of strawberry leaves, a well known member of the late Georgian *haute volée*. To a chambermaid's gusto for the humanly intimate she joins an Elizabethan frankness in expressing her opinions regarding the men and women of her world. For Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Northumberland, reflects without constraint the follies, foibles, and *joie de vivre* of her day. The volume contains copious editorial notes of James Greig, whose introduction sketches the Duchess in relation to her social stage, following a foreword biography by the present Duke of Northumberland. All in all, "The Diaries of a Duchess" will make the general reader feel he is acquiring cultural merit while deriving unqualified entertainment from what he reads.

We have read "A Musician and His Wife" (Harper), by Mrs. Reginald de Koven, with growing impatience. If the reader expects these memoirs to reveal a host of delightful facts about the composer of "Robin Hood" and other charming operas, he is sure to be disappointed. The reminiscences are almost entirely concerned with Mrs. de Koven's own experiences and achievements, social and literary. Perhaps we are a bit weary these days of the glittering, posturing charm of the nineties and prefer our description of *fin de siècle* celebrities in a slightly more realistic vein. Though the jacket note declares that this book reveals "some of the best and most interesting aspects of American life", we find in it far too much glorification of ball-and-fringe tradition. It smacks distinctly of the Little Rollo school of biography, whose ghost we imagined to be safely laid by a new and more vigorously critical appreciation of life.

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