

PEANUTS, POPCORN, CHEW- ING GUM AND CANDY.

NEW YORK NIGHTS. *By Stephen Graham.*
Doran. \$4.

ESSAYS, NEW AND OLD. *By Aldous Huxley*
Doran. \$2.

ARE THEY THE SAME AT HOME? *By Beverley*
Nichols. Doran. \$2.50.

MORROW'S ALMANACK FOR 1928. *Text and pic-*
tures by 49 contributors. Edited by Burton
Rascoe. William Morrow & Co. \$2.

SHOW WINDOW. *By Elmer Davis. John Day Co.*
\$2.50.

STEPHEN GRAHAM, the literary vaga-
bond, who has written of the night-life of
London, Berlin, Paris and Moscow, in his
new book on the night-life of New York,
makes a surprising statement in the first
chapter. This statement sets him apart from
every other foreign visitor who has ever made
a peep, given out an interview, written a
book or shot off his mouth about New York.
He says that the lights of Broadway are not
garish. His phrasing is: "There is no garish-
ness, no glaring competition of lights. . . .
My commonest reflection as I walk up and
down the Great White Way is that some-
where behind the scenes there is a marvel-
lously gifted producer".

For those few words alone he should be
initiated into the Exclusive Order of Avoiders
of Second-hand Opinions and given permis-
sion to arrive in the city at any time without
being tendered a welcome by Grover Whalen.
In the rich vocabulary of foreign literary
men, Broadway has been "garish" ever
since I can remember; just as, in the word-
book of the benign old whiskers who write
editorials for the London reviews, America
has been "crude" ever since my grandfather
could remember, — "crude" and sometimes
"vulgar". One expected G. K. Chesterton
to maintain his reputation for paradox when
he came over here to lecture. But, no: he
took the word right out of his predecessors'
mouths when he first saw Broadway at night;
and the word was "garish". The skyscrap-
ers of New York are "immense"; the traffic
in Fifth Avenue is "bustling"; citizens of the
metropolises of America "always seem to be
in a hurry"; we are a "very young, hopeful,
energetic and vital people"; Chicago "gives
one an impression of immense, unorganized
power"; the Chicago stockyards smell; the

American "makes a poor lover because he
thinks of making money first"; lifts are for
some odd reason called elevators. There is
no limit to the meagreness of the vocabulary
of the literary foreigners when they visit these
shores. One sometimes feels, on reading
their books about America, that they might
just as well have written them after a five
minutes' conversation over the London-New
York radio telephone.

After having learned that the word "gar-
ish" did not leap into Mr. Graham's mind
when he first saw Broadway and that he had
probably not ever permitted it to lodge there
before coming here, one is safe in assuming
that in roaming about New York at night
Mr. Graham has elsewhere used his eyes and
ears and good common sense. And so
he has.

"The children of Third and Sixth Avenues
talk two octaves higher than those of Fourth
and Madison." That is because the noise of
Third and Sixth Avenues is greater than that
of Fourth and Madison and children brought
up on those streets naturally must accus-
tom their vocal organs to the auditory
conditions they find themselves in.

The two unusual words the visitor hears
most frequently in the New York literary set
are, "sophisticated" and "synthetic". Mr.
Graham explains why.

At the entrance of the most famous of New
York burlesque houses, the Houston Street
Winter Garden, appears the notice, "Leave
all your troubles behind all ye who enter
here. — Dante". And above the proscen-
ium the legend reads: "The Show's the
Thing. — Shakespeare".

There is a "peep-show" in the Negro belt
of Harlem in One Hundred and Twenty-fifth
Street, where you can play checkers for ten
cents a game and chess for a quarter and you
do not have to pay if you lose. (Mr. Gra-
ham's English vocabulary betrays him here.
When he says "peep-show", he does not
mean what Americans mean by that word:
he means a penny arcade.)

The police of the East Side never arrest
either men or women for drunkenness; when
they arrest a drunken person it is because
that person has complicated drunkenness
with some other offense.

Myself for some years a professional reporter of the various aspects of life in New York, I have found Mr. Graham not only to be an accurate observer and reporter but astonishingly thorough and conscientious in ferreting out the features of New York's night-life that have not hitherto been discovered in writing. He writes entertainingly and accurately about the more obvious phases of New York's night-life: the night-clubs and the Bowery, Chinatown and Harlem, the flop-houses, speak-easies, the Ritz Roof, Jefferson Market Court, Greenwich Village and Broadway, Texas Guinan's club and Paul Whiteman's. But he also has discovered Libuse, the "crazy waiter" who is so fantastically amusing at banquets and private dinners; he has discovered Moscovitz's and the Hungarian restaurant on Second Avenue where that fine artist plays the cymbolum; and he has discovered corners and theaters, vicious places and bright spots I never heard of.

The speak-easies Mr. Graham has visited and described are enough to make one wonder how his stomach and kidneys have survived such an enormous amount of varied kinds and qualities of bootleg liquor. He even had the nerve to drink some stuff in a dive in Chinatown while alone and the liquid proved to have knock-out drops in it . . . and they did not knock him out. Either this talk about poisoned hooch is all wrong, or Mr. Graham has a constitution that makes him immune to death by drink.

No matter what other form of writing a young Englishman takes up at first, he succumbs soon or late to the essay and in due time he has written enough pieces to make up a book which some obliging publisher brings out and an obliging American publisher imports in sheets. The book is usually called "Essays, New and Old", "Things and Places", "Intimations", "Cuttings", "Critical Sheafs", "Pot-boilers", "From a Library", or more boldly and uncompromisingly, simply "Essays". Mr. Huxley has chosen "Essays, New and Old".

On off days when the news is not worth comment in the editorial pages of American newspapers there are hundreds of essays just

as good as, or better than, the essays that get into books in England. I need mention only Clifford Raymond of *The Chicago Tribune*, E. M. Kingsbury and Strunsky of *The New York Times*, Nevins and Lippmann of *The New York World*, who turn these editorials out and regard them merely as space-fillers.

There are certainly a host of others whose names I don't know. Should Clifford Raymond take a sheaf of his editorials, like the one on the inebriety of the sap-sucker or about the old gentleman in overcoat, overshoes and umbrella whose body was found on the road from Liege, I think he would have a hard time finding a publisher.

Yet an American publisher will have no hesitancy in bringing out a book of essays in which some young Oxford squirt writes coyly about the lace curtains of his study window or takes Michaelangelo down a peg or two in an essay half English and half bastard-French, in which there is a liberal sprinkling of Italian and Latin phrases and reference to the more obscure names in the index of Vasari's "Lives".

Mr. Huxley is many cuts above most of these young Englishmen who are never happy until they have published a book of essays; and yet he is typical: his style is much more complex than are his ideas, and his erudition is more interesting than his mind.

Intellectually these young essayists run in herds. For some time now they have been pasturing among the Italian primitives, the Elizabethans, rococo Spanish art, the lesser Eighteenth Century French writers, the Russian ballet, and the more recondite aspects of the movies. And as they pasture they fight among themselves over the fodder.

Mr. Huxley fights with Mr. Clive Bell over the Siennese primitives; Mr. Richard Aldington growls and gets snappy if anyone gets near his patch of Eighteenth Century *Précieux*; Mr. T. S. Eliot doesn't want anyone to nibble at his Donne, Webster and Jules Laforgue; Mrs. Virginia Woolf has a little tuft of erudition over which she sits with superb defiance, aided and abetted by Mr. Bell, who so far lost his senses in his gallantry to the lady as to say that Mrs. Woolf and Thomas Hardy are the only two great novelists the world has produced in

years and years and years. So it goes; with F. S. Flint, Edward Shanks, the Sitwells, Osbert Burdett, J. B. Priestley, Edwin Muir, Wyndham Lewis, James Agate, squabbling but alike. One thing you can almost bet on, and that is that whenever one of them brings out a book of essays it will contain references to Giotto, Crebillon, Magnasco, Stravinsky, John Donne, Tintoretto, Marlowe, and Mozart. Those are the names they are chewing most now.

Mr. Huxley has stolen two or three marches on his brothers. When they weren't watching he chased down to Tunis and got material for an essay entitled, "In a Tunisian Oasis". Then when their backs were turned he grabbed a copy of "Three Years in Tibet", and made Tibet his oyster. Apparently Mr. Huxley does not know that Tibet has had more volumes written about it than any other country outside of Europe. Every publishing season brings in half-a-dozen new ones. It is a country that is supposed to be impenetrable to foreigners. Yet, unless they are liars, travel-writers go there every year in droves.

After reading one book on Tibet he permits himself to write: "Tibet is so full of fantastic low comedy that one hardly knows where to begin a catalogue of its absurdities". And he goes on to enumerate these absurdities. None of them is more absurd than Mr. Huxley generalizing, after reading one book about a country he has never been to; but what is more, some of the absurdities he enumerates were denied categorically and in detail, if I remember rightly, by a Tibetan woman, married to an English army officer, who published a book on Tibet last year. True enough, Mr. Huxley appears to have written the essay in order to say at the end, "in spite of Mr. Winston Churchill and the state of contemporary literature, we can still look at Tibet and feel reassured". It is like writing an essay-review of a book on Chinese porcelains in order to drag the name of Charles A. Levine into the last line.

But Mr. Huxley on Peter Breughel is simply divine. After he has written an introduction in the course of which he has mentioned Matisse, Landseer, Luca della Robbia, Magnasco, Carlo Dolci, Van Gogh, Renoir,

Isabelle d'Este, Mantegna, Michaelangelo, Rubens, El Greco, Ruskin, Philip the Second, Gothic architecture, Byzantine mosaics, made references to modern drama, Latin hexameters, and quoted an apophthegm (sic) of Renoir's, he tells us what he does when he is about to pronounce final judgment upon a painter:

"Is this man a competent painter? Has he something to say, is he genuine? These are the questions a critic must ask himself. Not, does he conform to my theory of imitation, or distortion, or moral purity, or significant form?"

When I saw and heard him at a public luncheon recently, Mr. Beverley Nichols seemed to be a personable and amiable lad, with a good speaking voice, a good address, and a neat trick of leading in jokes slyly by the hand instead of dragging them in by the hair of the head, and the jokes weren't too ancient. When he grows up, he ought to make a good toastmaster at public dinners. While he is training for that I should say, after reading "Are They the Same At Home" (interviews with various personages like Michael Arlen, Noel Coward, Edna Best, and others of even less consequence) that, if he stays over here, *The New Yorker* might give him some occasional work to do. He's that type.

Of "Morrow's Almanack for 1928" I can say that, in both the limited and the regular edition it is one of the most beautiful pieces of book-making I have seen put out to the general trade in several years; that I greatly enjoyed editing it, although it was mostly edited during the lunch-hour with Thayer Hobson and Ruth Boynton over tables at the Divan Parisien, the Hannibal café, and a quiet speak-easy on days I could get away that long from THE BOOKMAN; that when it came out, I had a lot of fun reading it, even including the horoscopes which I wrote myself; that person after person has told me that I have hit it on the head about them in the horoscopes, whereas the only one that was written seriously is the one involving my birthday; that there are forty-nine contributors and all of them did nobly by the

enterprise; that if you put a copy in the guest room, your guests will get more culture out of it than by reading all the books of essays like "Essays, New and Old" published in England during the last decade.

Some good friend should warn Mr. Elmer Davis that if he doesn't soon get over his Freudian envy of H. L. Mencken he is going to make himself utterly ridiculous. It has got so that he can hardly write a single piece without spluttering out something about Mencken or Menckenians. He resembles Mencken in a great many ways in his writings, but mostly as a caricature of Mencken: he pounds his chest and then pounds the table; he is bluff, stentorian, out for a fight like a bully in a riverfront speak-easy; he is very proud of himself and very sure of himself; he flogs dead cats, wears his hat askew, runs after the younger generation of writers like a policeman chasing kids off the grass in Central Park; he wears a cigar; he wants it to be known that he is unorthodox in an orthodox way, an enlightened Tory, a radical conservative, a realist who does not hesitate to say just what he thinks; he denounces impotence and upholds virility in the national letters (as if those conditions might be affected by prayer); and he generalizes vociferously from debatable premises and on shaky evidence.

Now all these characteristics are somewhat Menckonian. Six of the eleven essays in this book might have appeared in *The American Mercury*, so in line are they with the policy of that stimulating magazine, and in fact one is rather surprised that they did not. Investigation discloses why. The other five essays and the preface are largely devoted to denouncing Mencken and the supposed influence that Mencken has had on American life and letters. After reading them with attention, it is easy to see what candidate Mr. Davis has in mind to take up the leadership whenever it can be wrested away from Mencken. He even states his policy:

"I am so unfortunate as not to belong to a gang, in an age when gang thinking is pretty nearly all the thinking there is; I am as unable to believe in the divine commission and

verbal inspiration of Henry Louis Mencken as in that of Calvin Coolidge . . . truly devout persons, in the Christian Era at least, have commonly regarded politics as a subdivision of religion; and now that we are passing perhaps into an Anti-Christian Era, religion has annexed art and letters as well. To the new orthodoxy not only what you say, but the very language in which you say it, has become a matter of dogma. It would not surprise me very much if within a few decades men and women were being burned at the stake for writing 'police', instead of 'Polizei', and leaving the 'o' out of 'Americanos'. If it startles you, consider that a third century Roman Senator would have been equally amazed by the news that his grandson had been butchered for entertaining incorrect opinions as to the divine and human nature in Christ. . . . I venture to emit these opinions in the hope that they may find favor with such scattered persons as have not bowed the knee to Baal, whether that deity be locally worshipped in the form of an acid Vermont Yankee or a chubby Baltimore German."

A regular campaign speech, *n'est-ce pas*? It begins with the humble 'I' standing majestically alone and asking for attention in humility; it calls attention to the corruption of the times; it proceeds to a warning against what has happened in the past; it brings in a reference to the gentle leader of Christianity; and it comes down to a resounding climax. The only trouble is that you don't know whether Mr. Davis is running for alderman of the Third Ward or asking to be allowed to take Mencken's place as a literary critic. But Mr. Mencken gave up literary criticism long ago. He writes a review or so ever so often but his main interests are elsewhere. There is no one to take his place, nor likely to be; for the conditions which made for his leadership were so dependent upon the rise of a vigorous and colorful personality, who could write like a genius, that they are not likely to develop for many years. And if Mr. Davis believes the conditions have arisen it may be slipped to him that if all other virtues were his, he cannot write well enough. He has no style.

MR. SPENDER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Wickham Steed

LIFE, JOURNALISM AND POLITICS. By J. A. Spender. Stokes. 2 vols. \$10.

BY a strange chance, James Alfred Spender, who has written this quiet and instructive book, and I, who review it, are both in the United States at the same moment. Each of us is receiving the same impressions of the thrust and swish of things in great American cities, above all, in New York; each is subjected daily, almost hourly, to the machine-gun-like clatter of headlines when we seek to discover what is going on in the world; and, like me, he has probably been overawed by the monumental size and terrific efficiency of the mighty newspaper buildings, towering temples of the journalistic faith, in which our American fellow-craftsmen follow their vocation. He, who worked for thirty years in the modest office of the old "sea-green" *Westminster Gazette*, nay, who was the *Westminster Gazette* for the greater part of that time, must be hard put to it to judge justly between the "Life, Journalism and Politics" he has known and the life, journalism and politics he sees reflected in the newspapers here.

Spender has been one of the truly great journalists of his age. Yet, if I read his record aright, he has never been associated with a commercially successful newspaper. By reasoned writing he probably did more than any single editor in England — with the possible exception of C. P. Scott of *The Manchester Guardian* — to mould British Liberal thought, and current British political thought in general. Morley and E. T. Cook, W. T. Stead, Massingham and Gardiner were his friends and contemporaries; but I think he out-influenced them all — as he has outlived them all save one — by dint of the daily dropping of his tranquil words onto sedate British minds. Nor was his influence confined to those who agreed with him. He was read as faithfully by opponents of his Liberal philosophy as by its ad-

herents. Not a few of his critics felt less sure of their own convictions after they had seen them calmly dissected in the *Westminster*. He has been a moderating, a humanizing factor in British public life.

Above all, he was and is transparently honest. With his views of Germany in the years before the war many of us were at variance. We thought him over-trustful of German assurances, too ready to give German statesmen the benefit of well-founded doubt, and sometimes a little blind to the evidence of hard facts. But we never questioned his intellectual probity. His book reveals the workings of his mind during that period — a period now so distant as to seem ancient history.

It reveals, too, one circumstance that has not hitherto been considered in judging the policy of his friend, Sir Edward Grey, in the crisis of July, 1914. Grey has often been criticized for not having made it clear, early in the crisis, that if Austria-Hungary and Germany should go to war over the Sarajevo crime, Great Britain would side with France and Russia. It has been argued that if he had told Germany that England would fight there would have been no war. Grey has answered this charge very effectively in his own book "Twenty-five Years"; and I, who caused *The Times* to advocate, from July 23, 1914 onwards, a policy more definite than that which Grey actually pursued, have since admitted publicly that in view of all the circumstances he was wise. But Spender shows that something more than a desire not to split the Government and the nation was among Grey's motives, something more subtle than the determination not to incur responsibility for an eventual conflict by allowing France and Russia to suppose that England was certain to stand by them. He hoped against hope and strove against destiny because he believed that if his impartiality remained unques-