

## IN BRIEF REVIEW

HENSHAW WARD, whose "Evolution for John Doe" was an event of a recent season, seems to have clicked again with the needs of the layman in his "Exploring the Universe" (Bobbs-Merrill), a fascinating opus about the next to incredible discoveries of recent science. If you don't care for Mr. Ward's game of "exploring molecules (in a drop of water) on a magic carpet" on the ground that it sounds too much like charades, you may sit in simple dignity and gape at the swarm of universes in the astronomy chapter, read how your right arm leads its life, ponder the strange doings of the Mendelian pea, go in for relativity or a dozen other important branches of learning, including the radio, all of which are lucidly explained in language suitable for all but the most backward of us. More exciting still, if your bent be at all philosophical, you should be able to figure out the answer to the author's startling question, "Is the egg matter or spirit?" The best of it is that Mr. Ward is a first rate guide who knows whereof he speaks.

In "Ballads of the Singing Bowl" Marjorie Allen Seiffert (Scribner) writes with moderate skill of topics both imaginative and commonplace; she can bear us with equal ease to the world of the ancient Nile and to that of a modern housekeeper; she displays no ecstatic burst of lyric passion, but has a simplicity that at times is effective and at times approaches the simplicity of bald prose. On the whole, her book is a very readable one, and reveals the author earnestly trying to express experiences and imaginings of an engaging but unpretentious type.

P. T. Barnum's autobiography preceded by many years the "confessions" which form so large a part of the popular literature of today. The reported sales of half a million copies of the showman's life would

indicate that colorful revelations were just as popular then as now. The various editions of the circus man's book have been assembled and condensed as "Barnum's Own Story" by Waldo R. Browne (Viking). The earlier chapters, taken from an edition printed when Barnum was unregenerately proud of his humbugs, are amusing and picturesque. As Barnum grew more prosperous, he toned down his misdeeds and let his press agents write new editions. The latter chapters show the result.

Even Frederick the Great wrote letters, and his favored correspondent seems to have been Voltaire. The correspondence is now brought together in "Letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great" (Brentano) with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. The letters do not read like those penned by the illustrious Zelide, yet the reader of historical background finds them to throw interesting light on the thought and action of the eighteenth century. The period covered is, roughly, from 1736 to 1778, years lacking in neither color nor event. Is it a moral obligation to one's times to write letters and preserve them? The reader lays down the book with an emphatic affirmative.

There is a parlor game known as "truth" in which the participants dispense with polite social lies for the duration of the sport. Since, however, the verities have a way of being unpleasant, this is an almost infallible way to spoil a party. M. André Tardieu, conscious that hard feelings already exist, has played "truth" in "France and America" (Houghton Mifflin). Published simultaneously in France and America, it was designed to inform his compatriots that Americans are neither philanthropic crusaders redeeming the debt of Lafayette nor yet barbarous vulgarians playing Shylock. Americans may learn that the French are neither a gay people fond of light wine nor wholly a tight

fisted peasantry who believe that a death in the family wipes out all debts. King Canute probably had a better chance of achieving his object than has Captain Tardieu of repelling the waves of misunderstanding, but the attempt in this case is interesting.

Stuart Sherman never became lost in eddies and backwaters, and "The Main Stream" (Scribner), his posthumously published collection of essays on books and writers, is appropriately titled. Mr. Sherman was convinced that "the full rush of living waters comes from the past" and in the present volume shows himself a critic based on precedent rather than conjecture. He perceived, however, the "vital congruity" of many of the so called moderns, and in these essays and reviews points his convictions as to the permanent value of the various component parts of the contemporary spectacle. The individual chapters, which cover such writers as Thomas Jefferson, Sandburg, Mark Twain, Beebe, Ring Lardner, Dean Briggs, Dreiser, Beer, Llewelyn Powys, Anatole France, and Edith Wharton, appeared originally in "Books", the literary supplement which he edited to such advantage for the New York "Herald-Tribune".

Dr. Morris Fishbein is still convinced that the establishment of a medical Utopia is a remote possibility at best, and has followed his earlier book, built on a similar premise, with "The New Medical Follies" (Boni, Liveright). Dr. Fishbein turns the spotlight of his semi-critical, semi-amused observation on such seeming absurdities as the beauty parlor, rejuvenation, dietary fads, psychoanalysis, and physical therapy, and concludes that "of all the nations of the world the United States is the most afflicted by its healers". Beneath a layer of mild satire, he marshals a host of staunch facts and the reader, after a few preliminary shocks, decides in the future to apply the common sense test to all matters pertaining to health, beauty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, lends himself well to the uses of a biographer. A man of parts, including wit

and humanness, his career which has been going on for only fifty three years in all shines with such titles as Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Rector of Glasgow University, High Steward of Oxford University, the youngest Lord High Chancellor of modern times, and his present office. A man well worth writing about and reading about, too, in the volume "Lord Birkenhead" (Doran) by Ephesian, though the most interested readers will probably be Englishmen. One thing about Lord Birkenhead is sure to appeal to Americans, however, and that is the fact that he was born F. E. Smith and is selfmade. When he became an Earl and it was fitting that he assume a crest, he chose for its inscription, "Faber Meæ Fortunæ (The Smith of My Own Fortune).

Happily free from its author's customary alarmist tendencies, "Re-Forging America: The Story of Our Nationhood" by Lothrop Stoddard (Scribner) is a profoundly lucid and exhaustive study of our country's growth from colonial times to the present day. The work lays stress upon such calamities, and their retarding effects upon national progress, as the Civil War, Reconstruction, undesirable immigration, factors in large measure responsible for the complexities of the contemporary Negro problem, the unassimilable foreign elements in our population, and the strife sowing alien. Dr. Stoddard sees no imminent menace to our security in radicalism, nor any likelihood of our disruption through internal racial conflict. That these dangers exist, though but remotely, he recognizes, and offers practical remedies for reducing their influences to the minimum.

In "The Outline of Sanity" (Dodd, Mead) Mr. Chesterton presents his traditional point of view with his well known cleverness, humor, and charm. The book is as interesting to follow as any of his because of the excitement in discovering the relevancy of apparently irrelevant relationships and examples. But while Mr. Chesterton, as usual, can make his reader believe anything that he chooses to tell him, the reader leaves with a basic disbelief and suspicion. What are we told? That man has become a machine, because the state is taking away his individuality which