

genius of Shelley. Of course he was a comic figure, blundering all the way from Eton to Spezzia, and he is of course fair game to the comic writer. But so was he a great lyric poet, sustained by a rich and lofty vision. M. Maurois is satisfied to represent him from without.

C. V. D.

SILK AND SANDPAPER

In "A Cure of Souls" (Macmillan) May Sinclair returns to a theme which has long been interesting her, and once more studies the deadly sin of sloth. Her victim is Canon Chamberlain of the parish of Queningford cum Kempston Maisey, who has so lapped himself in the soft comforts of his profession that he has lost every sense of its harder duties and likewise of the world at large. Comfort has made him too tender to risk such adventures as love or service, but it has left him thick-skinned enough when it comes to resisting any invasions of his peace. The situation thus affords Miss Sinclair every opportunity for that ironical analysis in which she takes a moralist's delight. Hating her slothful victim as she must, she purrs as she exposes him to the winds of contempt, realizing, nevertheless, that he would hardly feel them were he alive. Perhaps he is not quite alive. Miss Sinclair's method does not demand that he be, as it does not quite permit it. She follows him through a disturbing period of his career, in which one curate grows disgusted and another loses his faith, a parish worker, for love of the canon, goes almost insane, the dissenters of the community are outraged by the canon's high-handed way with the war memorial, and the moods aroused in different members of his entourage by the war are allowed to

sink down to the old apathy which is dearer to him than salvation. He is, in this handling, merely an exquisite oyster fighting to be left contented in his shell. Miss Sinclair does not trouble to furnish him with full complement of human instincts. She is satisfied to assign to him the single quality of refined sloth and to tempt him with a variety of reasons for overcoming it, with such a variety, in fact, that her exposure of him amounts to a kind of satirical persecution. Yet if her method is thus so simple as to be argumentative, it is also deft and silken in the skill with which she embroiders his world.

If her hand is clad in silk, that of Percy Marks in "The Plastic Age" (Century) is clad in sandpaper. He takes a sensitive youth, Hugh Carver, through a modern American college, testing it and him one by the other. The art of Mr. Marks is far from faultless. He cannot help arguing at times, and he wastefully drives the most striking character out of the book when it is half over. But behind the book is the unmistakable feel of reality. The recent undergraduates of American fiction have all been poets or wits, who have contrived to throw over their environment much of their exceptional charm. Though Hugh is something of a poet, he does not transfigure his companions. As he moves through the typical experiences of his kind, he encounters, for the most part, convincing persons and finds himself, almost altogether, in convincing situations. As a document, "The Plastic Age" is very thorough; most of what is most characteristic of recent college life, without beguiling hazes, is here exhibited. Of a certain new spirit stirring in certain of the American colleges

and universities, particularly of that spirit brilliantly portrayed in Lucien Price's study of the Amherst experiment and temporary defeat in "Prophets Unaware" (Century), the novel shows little consciousness. This, however, is virtually all it lacks. The historian of education can no more overlook it than he can overlook "The Hoosier Schoolmaster" or "This Side of Paradise." At the same time, "The Plastic Age" has considerable dramatic power and a robust narrative movement. And, above all, it has a very real excellence in its reproduction of the language of undergraduates. To read the chapter in which Hugh and his friends translate Coleridge and Keats and Masfield and Wordsworth into their barbarous, but not actually unappreciative, jargon is to find out as much about the spiritual attitude of the average undergraduate as probably can be found out from any passage of equal length in native literature.

C. V. D.

TWO BOOKS ON MODERN ART

There is a pleasant connotation back of the word "primer." It may make one smile at childish things now put away, but it may also suggest that even in this complex age it is sometimes possible to "escape for a while from High Learning and get back to a child's directness of approach." And that is what Mr. Sheldon Cheney has tried to make us do in "A Primer of Modern Art" (Boni and Liveright). No aspect of modern life is so hedged in with technicalities and obscurities of speech as is that dealing with art. Yet in any gallery where modern pictures hang one may hear not only the "I could do something as good as that," but also "What do

people see in these things?" The question is asked with irritation, with bewilderment, often with a touch of wistfulness, almost always with sincerity. The artists themselves are incapable of answering it. They are an inarticulate lot. Their medium is paint, not words. The critics seem, to the lay mind, to move in a haze of inexplicable, and unexplained, words, such as tactile values, significant form, rhythm, volume. Mr. Cheney has hoped, as he says in the foreword to his "Primer," to "lead on the interested but often puzzled Progressive Citizen, until he found himself on intimate emotional terms with modern art, with just enough of background knowledge to make him feel at ease in such new surroundings." The difficulty is that such "intimate emotional terms" are not easily come by unless one is among those rare and fortunate persons born with a capacity for recognizing beauty however strange and new the dress she wears. The optimistic reader may only too easily fancy that a conscientious perusal of Mr. Cheney's book will give him immediately the answers to all his questions about modern art. It will, as Mr. Cheney modestly hopes, give him answers to many of them, though not always in the words of one syllable for which he is looking. If, however, he is honestly interested in modern art, the "Primer" will give him a brief summary of its background, a glimpse of the theory upon which it is founded, a sense of its relationship to modern life, and will guide him along the main channel and some of the tributaries it is flowing through to-day. Architecture, sculpture, engineering, the art of the theater and of the color organ have also their place in the story, and