

mind, or reason, which is the predominant element in us who are human creatures; it is this which renders a human being human, and distinguishes him essentially and generically from the brute."

"Dr. Crile does not agree with this view. Man, says Dr. Crile, is a mechanism, a physico-chemical mechanism—"man and other animals." But the singularity of his mechanism is the size of his brain. Like the brute, apparently, he is moved to action by his senses only, and in the special direction which these suggest. But "as a result of the multiplicity of action patterns evolved in the larger brain of man, the body of man is driven in more intricate ways than that of any other animal." Brute instincts, according to the Pope, "can attain their purpose by means of things which lie within range; beyond their verge the brute creation cannot go." The same, as Dr. Crile seems to intimate, is true of man. "The environment is the mold which predetermines the man." But while other brutes have little or no power to change environment, man has some power, and "the only way by which the action patterns of a people can be altered is by changing the mold—altering the environment. Thus slowly science and invention and human experience modify the mold which stamps generations to come."

Assuming that man has the power of modifying the mold, implying consciousness, it is easy to agree with Dr. Crile that "all responsibility for human action" is fixed "here and now within one's self." The unscientific Pope also insists that man is "master of his acts." But the real question is not whether, as the Pope affirms and the biologist denies, man "guides his ways under the eternal law and the power of God." The real question is whether man, a physico-chemical mechanism, can have choice and responsibility. Considering the extreme casualness with which Dr. Crile makes this assumption, one is compelled to regard his philosophy as amateurish in method, if nothing else. And to have combined such half-formed philosophy with such absorbing expert observations is to have blemished an otherwise valuable book. If Dr. Crile had only kept demonstrating the mechanistic facts, he would have been twice as influential on philosophy.

F. H.

Isaiah, Jr.

America's Coming of Age, by Van Wyck Brooks. New York: B. W. Huebsch. \$1.00.

THIS is one of the books which worry the reviewer and delight the reader. It cannot be summarized. To attempt to summarize it would be about as just to the author as trying to dry a jelly-fish over a fire. The summary would omit too much of the life of the creature. Nor is the book an argument, which can be accepted, or refuted and left for dead. It is gifted conversation, a sort of high comment, a little more deliberate than table-talk, more artful than journalism, yet free of pedantry and all the deeper responsibilities which weigh down so much of our thought. It is the reflection of a young mind that is rich in knowledge. It has the quality we should wish our conversation to have if we were happy, clever people living in a spacious world.

Mr. Brooks swings through time and space with gaiety and anger. "Let others qualify," he seems to say, "let others pick up the pieces of outraged reputations . . . this is the way I feel about life, and I am not writing for the scrutiny of omniscience." It is companionable and exhilarating, and the only reaction that counts is the total

reaction. You like Mr. Brooks or you don't, for what he exposes is a temperament, and about temperaments people do not reason. They trust their instincts to say yes or no. So it is well perhaps to confess that I read without stopping, and that after a few pages a thing happened which occurs rarely to a reviewer of books. I became more interested in the author than in my review. I forgot to think of what there was to say about Mr. Brooks.

Only a net impression remains which seems to say: "I'm for him, but what is he for?" Between the lines glowed a sense of life to which a man would respond, a feeling for values, for distinction and dash, for the chivalry of democracy. But exact definition of his ideal escapes Mr. Brooks, as it would anyone else. After all, the virtues of life have almost always been defined in negatives, and of negatives Mr. Brooks makes liberal and justifiable use. He finds that the American spirit may be summed up historically under two catchwords—"highbrow" and "lowbrow," and that unhappily they have been almost exclusive of each other. He plunges through the history of American culture brandishing this weapon of classification, using it sometimes as a sword and then as a slapstick. So brightly does he wield it that many who are horrified by the destruction will have to admit that here at least is a war of ideas so gallantly waged that it would hallow any cause.

That "one so young" as Mr. Brooks should after all be seeking a golden mean between highbrow and lowbrow, quite as if he had taken Aristotle to heart, will save him a bit in those shambles of literature when the young and innocent are reviewed by the old and innocent. "Don Quixote is the 'highbrow' under a polite name," says Mr. Brooks, "just as Sancho Panza is the eternal 'lowbrow'; and if the adorable Dulcinea is not a vision of the night and a daily goal in the mind of our professors, then there is no money in Wall Street. One admits the charm of both extremes, the one so fantastically above, the other so fantastically below the level of right reason; to have any kind of relish for muddled humanity is necessarily to feel the charm of both extremes. But where is all that is real, where is personality and all its works, if it is not essentially somewhere, somehow, in some not very vague way, between?"

Here is the motif of his comment, but his illustration and incident, though hung upon it in workmanlike fashion, have an interest which transcends the central theme. There is a chapter called "Our Poets" in which American literary figures are treated to a criticism that almost makes a man wish to read them again. "It is no use to go off into a corner with American literature, as most of the historians have done—in a sulky private sort of way, taking it for granted that if we give up world values we are entitled to our own little domestic rights and wrongs, criticism being out of place by the fireside. 'But oh, wherever else I am accounted dull,' wrote Cowper in one of his letters, 'let me pass for a genius at Olney.' This is the method of the old-fashioned camp in American criticism, just as the method of the contemporary camp is the method of depreciative comparison with better folk than our own."

Mr. Brooks says so many "good things" about literature that he is in danger of having his book, which flows so easily, chopped up into a mosaic of smart sayings. But a few sentences are hard not to quote:

"To Longfellow the world was a German picture-book, never detaching itself from the softly colored pages. He was a man of one continuous mood; it was that of a flaxen-haired German student on his *wanderjahr* along the Rhine, under the autumn sun,—a sort

of expurgated German student—ambling among ruined castles and reddening vines”

And than rather rudely: “But frankly, what preparation is a life like this for a poet whose work it is to revivify a people?”

This becomes the refrain. Mr. Brooks burns and begs for thought that shall be real and action that is illuminated. Ways and means he does not consider. He suggests no fertilizers for the soil in which an ideal Americanism can be grown. It is true that he mentions socialism, but that is a word which is too naked to-day to inspire or terrify. I could not free myself of the sense that Mr. Brooks was trying to issue specifications for a messiah. There was one affirmative note which the book seemed to lack—the ultimate democratic realization that we shall have to be our own messiah. Mr. Brooks cannot wait in the wilderness for an authentic revelation. The revelation is here, a living thing—he can see it if he wishes in the very positive aspirations which inspire the destructive comment of his own book. The bible of democracy which Mr. Brooks seems to want everyone but himself to write exists in part because such men as he already desire it, and are so admirably equipped to say why.

W. L.

Emerson Anew

Ralph Waldo Emerson, by Oscar W. Firkins. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. \$1.75 net.

“THERE have been many lives of Emerson, but this is the first since the publication of the ten volumes of journals, which has put into print a vast amount of new biographical and critical material.” This is quoted from the wrapper of the latest book on Emerson. The first of the sentence is indisputable. Mr. Firkins’ book is the first since March, 1914; but the second part is misleading, for the 5,500 odd pages in the published journals, though “put into print” 1909-1914, were all available for the preparation of Mr. Cabot’s two volumes of 1888. The new book reaffirms the Memoir in its 156 pages devoted to Emerson’s life and his friends, and their social and literary activities; and devotes the remainder to a chapter of recapitulations of the successive essays, three chapters in analysis of his prose, his verse, and his philosophy, and a final short essay on his “Foreshadowings.”

The chapters on Emerson’s life are solid and interesting though somewhat of a disappointment to the old reader of Emerson who would like to see the old Emerson presented in scenes and episodes that his literary executor had chosen to omit. His homely joys in Concord, his relations with the Reverend Ezra Ripley and Sam Staples, his gardening, his reading, his stimulating friendship with Ellery Channing, his affectionate regard for George Bancroft and Jones Very, the gradual and natural composition of his notable utterances of 1836, ’37 and ’38, his state of mind while under fire for the Divinity School Address, are still left for some other biographer. The excellence of these early chapters lies not so much in the fresh biographical material as in the fresh effectiveness of certain critical dicta, such, for example, as the following:

Emerson’s peculiar social temper, markedly gregarious but only half companionable, is manifest even in these early days.

The order of decay in these early doctrines [of Emerson’s] seems to have had this course: they became, first subsiding, then useless, then false.

He prepared a life broad enough to include not only

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a mansion for the principles but a playground for the moods.

Alcott is, indeed, a most instructive figure for the critic of Emerson; he represents the upper Emerson cut off from the lower, and by his limitations and relative inefficiency, he illustrates, as nothing else could do, the priceless service which this lower Emerson rendered to the upper.

A defect in the biographical chapters which becomes more marked in the critical portion of the book is a spotty incoherence of treatment. Sometimes this appears in a strange and unheralded jump, as the one from the death of little Waldo to a discussion of transcendentalism with not even a conjunction to bridge the abyss, and sometimes in an awkwardly purfunctory linking, such as “One other feature must be glanced at in this place,” “It is time to say a word or two of—,” “It is now our duty to say something—,” and others of the sort. Such stylistic infelicities would be negligible if they did not yield a clue to the extreme spottiness of the critical chapters. These are exhausting to the reader who wants to carry away group impressions rather than isolated pieces of data. Each of Emerson’s chief essays is epitomized as an independent unit. He is discussed as Prose Writer under XVIII roman-numeraled heads, as Poet under VIII more, one of which has twelve subdivisions, and as Philosopher under XXXI others; all of which inclines the classroom pedagogue, if he is petulant, to reform and lead a better life, or if he is painstaking, to lay those chapters aside against the millennial day when he will have time to study them at length.

The last chapter is happily the best in the book: cordial,