

is a church" quicken his pages, but at bottom it is as a book of protest that "The Way of Martha and the Way of Mary" will be best understood. It explains the occasional air of fretted dogmatism, curiously like the irritatingly impatient style of Price Collier's "England and the English," although the basic viewpoint is radically dissimilar. But both books have this in common—they defend an order that is changing. Collier happened to defend an order that is stupid and shameful. Graham defends an order of beauty and grace, although disorganized and cruel. Therein lies the value of the book for us who rebel at that chaos and cruelty. We should be alert and wary. For in changing it we may strip it of its glamour and make it ugly; we may lose more than we gain.

HAROLD STEARNS.

Soft Lights

Escape and Other Essays, by Arthur Christopher Benson. New York: The Century Co. \$1.50 net.

IN these pages we encounter an agreeable, highly cultivated and mildly interesting personality, gifted with a finely-balanced judgment and a sincere and delicately ordered taste. Mr. Benson's weakness is that he writes almost too easily and pleasantly. We never find in him the passion and exultation of the first-rank artist. Lamb, too, is a gentle spirit, but he has exquisite tenderness and fibrous conviction, as compelling in their way as the gorgeous inspired rhetoric of De Quincey.

In his present volume Mr. Benson is more than usually autobiographical. He excuses himself for publishing such a book in wartime by saying that war is like pestilence. "The best way to resist it is not to brood over it, but to practice joy and health." The essays describe the spiritual impressions of the author's school and college days, narrate several semi-mystical experiences of his recent life, criticise some aspects of recent poetry, and outline a theory for art in its relation to the deeper joy of life. The significance varies greatly. Some of the essays are rather trifling. The title-essay and that called "Herb-Moly and Heartsease" are far-fetched in method. There is ample left, however, to reward the admirer of Mr. Benson, or indeed any thoughtful person, for reading the whole, an essay or part of an essay at a time.

For all his mildness Mr. Benson is an individualist, descended from Emerson through Arnold, and his attitude is often surprising. He praises realism, attacks "literary" poetry, believes in teaching children the facts of sex, and almost rhapsodises over Walt Whitman. The essay on Whitman is the most vivid in the volume. Mr. Benson praises the good gray poet for revealing frankly and unreservedly his entire self. In "That Other One" we find a subtle but striking study of man's dual nature; the self that reasons and the self that decides, corresponding to the rational and the intuitive faculties of M. Bergson. The field particularly developed is the nature of art. Mr. Benson defines it subjectively as "the perception and comparison of quality," a penetration to the spiritual through material forms in themselves often ugly, a realization of what we vainly try to classify by the name of "charm." The cultivation of this perception is a broader sort of religion than that "which dares not attribute to God many of the finest and sweetest things in the world." This philosophy and the author's method of stating it are things peculiarly needed by America to-day. The concrete illustrations, especially those from nature, are perhaps the best part of Mr. Benson's writing.

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