

Remembered Yesterdays

Remembered Yesterdays, by Robert Underwood Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. \$5.00.

ALMOST by common consent a man who has reached the age of sixty may feel free to set down his Reminiscences. The major part of his career is over, and the tenure of life is uncertain. He may now write with more assurance, or at least confidence; and he may expect to be heard with greater deference, or at least patience. Yet men of sixty, each intent on exhibiting himself in his own day and circle, have become rather oppressively numerous. In the circumstances, acknowledgments are due Mr. Johnson for having postponed his Autobiography until the age of seventy: 1853 and 1923 are the dates involved. However, the term "autobiography" is expressly disdained—and indeed "sheaf of reminiscences" (though the gathering is none too well coördinated) might be a juster designation. Yet the main stages of this life are presented in good chronological order: a boyhood and youth in Indiana—elaborate beyond the needs of the case; a forty years' period of editorial life in New York, with constant relish for multitudinously encountered celebrities; and lastly the ambassadorship to Italy, with its curiously objective view of the San Remo Conference as a constellation of lofty and somewhat remote luminaries. Mr. Johnson also does full justice to his efforts in behalf of International Copyright and toward the shaping of an American Academy of Arts and Letters. Here, as elsewhere, great names shine—like cards dropped on an extended tray. Here, as elsewhere, a somewhat naïf and disarming consciousness of the presence of fine company. The author professes to have tempered his text by a sense of humor; yet this, often slender and none too cogent, sometimes calls for indulgence. The book, as a whole, suggests the large bamboo cabinets once in vogue—bulk with slightness. Yet, taken part by part, rather than as an organic entity, it has its agreeableness and its interest: the statuettes and miniatures perched on its many small shelves are capable of yielding a good measure of entertainment.

H. B. F.

American Artists

American Artists, by Royal Cortissoz. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$3.00.

NAMES do not matter. Values do. Therefore, although there are many names among the essays assembled in Mr. Cortissoz's book, of figures more or less known in America, it is the author's attitude toward men's work that is significant. For he has been faithful to the doctrine enunciated at the beginning. He says he is a "conservative." He believes that "certain fundamental laws" of art have been recognized in schools and academies. He "disbelieves" in what he names "modernism," on the ground that it "flouts fundamental laws" and repudiates art's function which is "the creation of beauty."

It is a rigid doctrine, rigidly adhered to, in the manner of a fundamentalist of the church. The most vital of contemporary American painters—to mention only John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Pascin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Demuth and the sculptor, Gaston Lachaise—are unnamed in these pages. If one wants a roster of the painters accepted in conservative circles and beloved of Fifth Avenue dealers; if one is interested in anecdotes

of Stanford White and McKim, of the late Charles Freer and even of Theodore Roosevelt, then this is the book to have. But its direct connection with art and artists is more than dubious.

First of all, Mr. Cortissoz draws a narrowly patriotic line against what he names "Ellis Island Art," as he invokes the absolute of "beauty"—whatever that may be—against "modernists." Unfortunately, the medicine Mr. Cortissoz prescribes for the modernist—"a drastic purgation of conceit and wilfulness, a thorough educational overhauling"—he seems himself not to have swallowed. He forgets or ignores that in the history of painting vital impulses have often had to fight the dead weight of academies with their commercial entrenchments. Manet had to struggle his life-long with the politics of intolerance, and in the struggle suffered just such slights and contumely as Mr. Cortissoz heaps upon Ellis Island Art and modernism. In fact, such a word as modernism has no place in a critic's vocabulary. It is his business to discriminate between the good and bad, whatever the appellatives carelessly used by the ignorant. The word, modernist, like the word radical, has become an absurdity because it is a vehicle for prejudice rather than a characterization.

Mr. Cortissoz is no less unfortunate in some of the applications of his rigid doctrine. Although he is careful not to mention many of the outstanding American workers of today, he does mention dealers and collectors. To read his chapter on New York As An Art Centre, is to gather that art triumphs when Mr. Worldly Wiseman pays a dealer \$40,000 for a painting by a dead painter. He strangely assembles in an ill-assorted trio of "poets in paint" the figures of Elihu Vedder, Ryder and Arthur B. Davies. He subscribes to the entirely outmoded contrast of the poetic versus the prosaic, when he writes of George Bellows that "he is dedicated too whole-heartedly to the depiction of what is prosaic in life to care about what is poetic, what is beautiful." And, condoning Roosevelt's, the great 100 percent American art patron's, liking for an admittedly inferior drawing, Mr. Cortissoz reveals the collapse of the respect due from a critic for mastery of a medium: "Technically the drawing has little to say. Of anything like style it is pathetically innocent. But it drives home a wholesome American idea, and Roosevelt, being a wise human being, knew when to dispense with technic." Now what has that to do with American Artists?

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