

THE BOOK TABLE

AUGUST FICTION

WHEN the philosophers of the French Revolution undertook to revise the calendar, they renamed August the fruitful month. It is decidedly not fruitful in fiction production; the theory apparently is that readers are too busy in vacation time in catching up with the early output of novels to buy new ones. But if this summer's season has a rather meager list of fiction to record, there are on it several stories which would attract attention at any time.

Most notable among these for its purely enjoyable qualities may be placed Mr. Herbert Quick's "The Hawkeye."¹ This is a worthy successor of "Vandemark's Folly," and carries on in a new generation the story of the Middle West from the primitive pioneer condition in which Uncle Jake Vandemark found Iowa down to the era of solid prosperity, conscious responsibility in local communities, and vigorous Statehood. With this growth young Fremont McConkey, its not very heroic hero, develops, through the era when political graft was taken as a matter of course and highly amusing at that, and even outlaws and horse thieves might be tolerated if they did not go too far, on to the period when public law and order were enforced and when even friendly neighbors were not forgiven for stealing the taxes, and people no longer laughed when the local boss said that he was honest but "not fanatical about it."

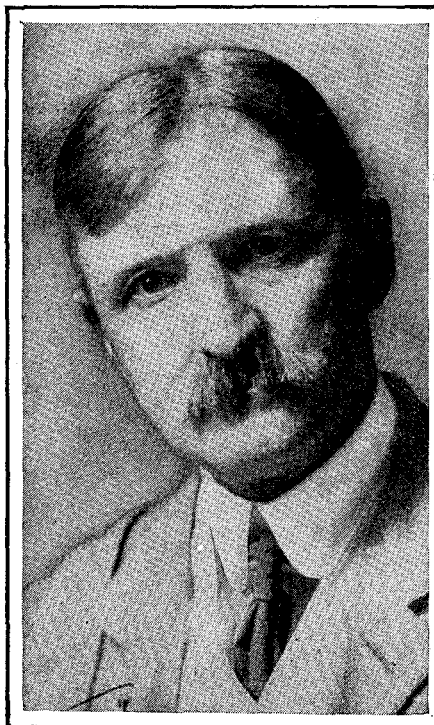
"The Hawkeye" has the same quiet humor and leisurely, pleasurable narrative style that gave flavor and quality to Mr. Quick's early story. It is not, thanks be, a super-thriller, but its incidents and characters take strong hold of the reader's attention and in due time a dramatic and stirring situation evolves. Above all, the book is a sound presentation of American life and traits, not given to high-flown eulogy, recognizing faults and weaknesses, but as a whole picturing the Mid-West as a growing-place for robust manhood. It is a book of substance in subject and suggestion, yet it is told in a highly entertaining manner, and its people are alert and decidedly alive.

Somewhat similar is Emerson Hough's posthumous novel, "North of 36,"² for it describes picturesquely a bygone period in American history—that just after the Civil War—and tells of the beginning of the great cattle drives from Texas northward. In this romance a courageous Texan girl,



HERBERT QUICK

who has fallen heir to a cattle ranch with some thousands of beasts but not a sign of a market for them, leads the very first drive of this kind in person, aided by a wise and tough old foreman and a mysterious Texas ranger, who furnishes most of the plot and all of the romance. The adventure was a reckless one, and great were the dangers from Indians, swollen rivers, and villains who were trying to buy up



Bain

EMERSON HOUGH

Texas cattle land before the drives north began. The thing goes through, and Texas becomes rich and prosperous. The book is quite as good as "The Covered Wagon," better if anything in plot, and it would make an equally popular "movie" if it is possible now to find big herds of long-horns to film. The trek of Maisie and her four thousand cattle is truly a Texan prose epic of desperation, danger, and victory. One incident only is distasteful; it is hard to believe, and certainly trying to the nerves to read, that a United States Army officer would turn over a white man to Indians to be tortured to death, however much the villain deserved it.

Mr. Norris's "Bread"³ (note that he still has the penchant for short titles that gave us "Salt" and "Brass") is not altogether a satisfying book. It is described as a novel of the woman in business. One feels that the author is seriously concerned to utter an impressive word of warning, but what is it? We are immensely interested in this young woman who pushes her way in business by cleverness and tact; we highly approve when she breaks her engagement with a twenty-five-dollar-a-week young man who expected her to quit work; we are sorry that she later yields to the allure of a temperamental and uncultivated but handsome suitor; we are bored by her unpleasant life with him; glad when, in the vernacular phrase, she shakes him and goes back to work; sorry when, years after, she hunts ex-hubby up, only to find that he has married again (she didn't know she was divorced); and finally sympathetic when she cries herself to sleep with her beloved cat.

But what does it all prove? The fact is that she has had a varied and successful life; she has had immense pleasure in her work; she has her sister's children to help bring up; she has lots of friends; she has had a time of romance, and she has also been lucky enough to get rid of a loud, vulgar, and bibulous husband. On the whole, she has done very well—a thousand times better than if she had gone on in genteel poverty instead of hustling out and getting bread for her weak mother and her little sister. We know that Mr. Norris didn't mean to leave us satisfied with Jeannette's experience, and we admit that her life was not complete; but happy wifehood and motherhood are not granted to all, and a woman like Jeannette might well be proud that she had gained independence, recognition, and usefulness in a marked degree. The story will surely cause discussion. It is not

¹ The Hawkeye. By Herbert Quick. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis. \$2.
² North of 36. By Emerson Hough. D. Appleton & Co., New York. \$2.

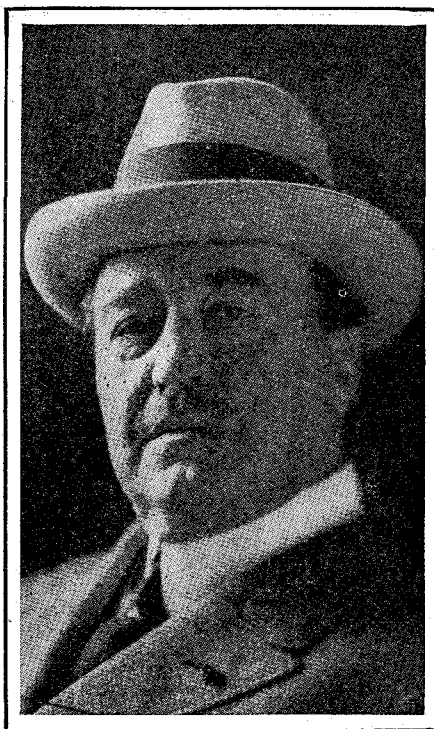
³ Bread. By Charles G. Norris. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.

as arresting as "Brass," but it is also less highly colored.

Rome under Caligula, Claudius, and Nero was surely not lacking in excitement or in tragic and stirring incident. The record of cruelty, debauchery, lust, incest, conspiracy, and brutal murder was one probably never matched in the court circles of any other civilized people in history. Mr. Van Santvoord's romance⁴ avails itself amply of these phases of his chosen period, and also of the contrasting elements of faith, purity, and constancy as seen especially in his heroine, Octavia, the unhappy daughter of Messalina and the unwilling wife of Nero; while the ambitious Nero and his implacable mother, Agrippina, stand out as strongly rendered and salient personalities. The romance and drama of the period are treated with dignity and scholarly completeness, and throughout the book there is evident not merely historical accuracy but a clear perception of the kind of people men and women were in Rome two thousand years ago. It covers perhaps too much ground to allow its narrative to have full dramatic unity or sharp development of plot and central situation, and its characters sometimes use a somewhat too high-sounding diction; but it is very far from being dull and its panorama of events is brilliantly painted.

Blasco-Ibanez's newly published story⁵ is remarkable in its singleness of literary purpose and the precise consistency of its character delineation. Of the woman called the Tempress in the English title of the book, one of the characters who followed her maleficent career said: "She isn't bad, she's merely a woman of impulse whose emotions never had the slightest training, and so she sows evil without knowing always what she is doing, because all her attention has been centered upon herself." This

⁴ Octavia. By Seymour Van Santvoord. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.50.
⁵ The Tempress. By V. Blasco Ibañez. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.



(C) Underwood

VINCENTE BLASCO-IBANEZ

puts the case too leniently; Elena was bad, instinctively as well as by self-indulgence. The devastation she wrought in men's lives, the tearing up morally of one little community, and the temporary destruction of a great reclamation project were cruelly planned point by point to satisfy her craving to watch her victims suffer in their jealousy and passion. Her fall to the lowest degradation was inevitable. The author's realism in portraying evil may not always please, but he certainly cannot be charged in this case with making vice attractive. The South American background of the story is unusual and well brought out. The novel is decidedly one of the author's best books, and from the standpoint of literary execution it is inferior to none of them, not even to his great success, "The Four Horsemen."

R. D. TOWNSEND.

THE NEW BOOKS

POETRY

HUNDRED POEMS (A). By Sir William Watson. Dodd, Mead & Co., Inc., New York. \$2.50.

It would be difficult to name an established English poet whose works suggest the need of "selection" more strongly than those of Sir William Watson. He has been so indefatigably a "poet of occasion" that the mass of his writings includes a great deal of no more than passing interest. These one hundred poems represent a process of selection by which poems of political and otherwise merely transient appeal are rejected. The process might very well have gone further. The poet of occasion is still here. Sir William is the kind of poet

of whom this is apt to be more or less consistently true. His poetry is that of a man talking with care and deliberation—and a certain amount of rhetoric—to his fellows generally on subjects of social or political significance. It is seldom brooding thought or feeling trembling inevitably and half unconsciously into speech. William Watson became a name in English poetry about forty years ago, and his work still has strong reminiscences of the Victorian manner. Although he is an ambitious poet in choice of theme and attitude and language, he is most successful in brief, simple lyrics. Had he written nothing else than the oft-quoted "April, April" lyric, he would

have made a definite contribution to English song.

TRAVEL AND DESCRIPTION

SPAIN IN SILHOUETTE. By Trowbridge Hall. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$3.

In flowing style the author describes, muses over, and expatiates upon the glories of Spain. Familiar and unfamiliar chapters of her history are presented with enthusiasm and piquancy. While the personal element in these sketches of travel is subordinated to the historic and romantic interest, it is by no means absent. Attractive pictures and large type help to make this a very readable book.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

SEVEN AGES. By A Gentleman With A Duster. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. \$2.

The author of "The Mirrors of Downing Street" turns away in the present volume from personal persiflage and satire and writes simply and humanly about what he calls "the pilgrimage of the human mind as it has affected the English-speaking world." The central thoughts of seven great teachers and thinkers are admirably told in these chapters on Socrates, Aristotle, Jesus, Augustine, Erasmus, Cromwell, and Wesley, while the final chapter discusses the effect of Darwinism on our own time and gives an estimate of the present status of thought and philosophy.

SCIENCE

RACIAL HISTORY OF MAN (THE). By Roland B. Dixon. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$6.

In this work the author, who is Professor of Anthropology at Harvard, approaches the entire racial problem *de novo* and reaches startling conclusions from the point of view of the modern anthropologist. Using as criteria of racial stock, not the usual ones of skin color, etc., but the cephalic indices based on the skull measurements of thousands of individuals, he concludes that the present human stock derives from eight elementary stocks which branched from the anthropoid ape stem at so very early a date as to be regarded as having been almost separate species. Yet these primitive stocks were able to interbreed, which they have done so thoroughly that they are now completely shuffled into a thousand different combinations. Accordingly our present beliefs as to what peoples constitute a given race are quite erroneous. If we judge by the cephalic index, we must group the Czechs with the Mongols in one race. The Scandinavian and the Eskimo are placed in another race. The Australian bushman and the Iroquois Indian are thrown together. And so on. The author admittedly regards the whole theory as experimental, and his conclusions are quite likely to cause much discussion among anthropologists.