

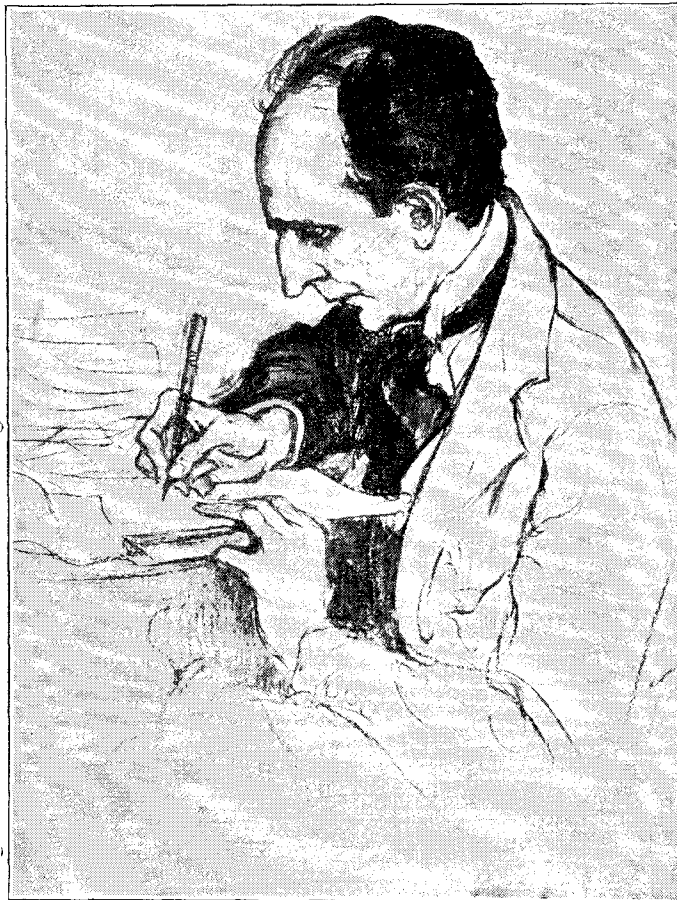
Three Good Books

The Memoirs of a Gothic American.

By ANNE KAVANAGH-PRIEST: Macmillan. Published March 29. \$2.50.

THIS American who chooses ironically to call herself "Gothic," would no doubt have titled her book "The Education of Nellie Parsons" if she had not been prevented by the somewhat bitter modesty which pervades her work and which would have betrayed her ancestry and upbringing if she had chosen to conceal them. As "The Grandmothers" was a Middle Western, so is this a feminine "Education of Henry Adams." The Gothic American is a woman of sixty whose memories center in a vanished scene. The Vermont homestead was a place where "by instinct, habit, inclination and environment" the Parsons family were "still in the old naïve Arcadian stage where personal worthfulness, honor, talent, skill, productive and strictly honest labor, neighborliness, distrust of personal display, self-restraint, zeal for moral and intellectual advancement, disinterested concern for the nation's needs, and respect for social contract," in other words, every quality now outmoded "were the recognized if not always the ruling ideals." The child who grew up there was the product of interesting heredity and invaluable training. The woman, looking back upon her, analyses the struggle of adolescence, the conflicts of passionate intellectualism with complicated home ties, of free spirit with limited opportunity, paints a noble portrait of an emergent soul. But more than that by her re-creation of the past and the figures from it and her constant moving backwards and forwards between the child that was and the woman who is, the staunch and high-minded Gothic American becomes a critic of American life as it has been, is and

may be quite as sound and perhaps by birth more deeply involved and more worthy of attention than many highly regarded Renaissance or Modern Americans. Mrs. Priest's memoirs should not have been given the "novel" tag. However excellent her characterizations, however strong and unaffected her descriptive passages, however well directed her emotion, still her book has not the narrative quality. It should be read in and at, not straight through like



SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA

His "Disarmament" has just been published by Coward-McCann

a novel. And it will be so read by the fortunate readers into whose hands it falls. To this reviewer, not profoundly impressed by the extra-biological achievements of her sex, the discovery of such a woman as Anne Kavanagh-Priest is heartening.

Belphégor. By JULIEN BENDA. Translated by S. J. I. LAWSON: Payson & Clarke. \$2. Published March 23. This book would be worth owning if only for the brilliant introduction by

Irving Babbitt which discusses Benda's polemic with such penetration as to leave little for a reviewer to say. Benda, introduced to American readers by "The Treason of the Intellectuals," published last fall, is a stalwart opponent of certain modern tendencies, especially such as are evidenced in the arts and in the public's attitude toward them. He is the foe of Rousseauism and, more immediately, of Bergsonism. The conclusion reached in "Belphégor," addressed to French readers, before the War, is applicable enough, here and now. It is an attack upon the prevalent "thirst for immediacy" and for "emotion through art." This cult has developed in France, according to M. Benda, because of the decadence of society (society in its youth being "firm and severe"), the influence of the Jews (M. Benda, a Jew himself, separates them, with considerable acumen, into the worshipers of Jehovah and of Belphégor) and the lowering of cultural standards, due to obvious causes. Change "decadence of society," to which we can scarcely pretend, although we have pseudo-decadent groups, to industrialism and reaction from puritanism, and you will find the same causes operating here. That which Benda describes as the decay of the intellect we prefer to call the effeminization of the intellect such as an industrial society tends to induce. Its results are to be seen in the popu-

larity of the cult of the subjective, of psychoanalysis, of intuition as against reason, of blurred outlines. The stream-of-consciousness novelists, the historians, biographers, critics and philosophers who strive for emotional rather than intellectual effect in their work, the outpouring, non-selective autobiographers—all these reflect the tendencies which M. Benda deplores. They have their audience in the public which demands that "art shall present the individual soul in its elementary

state," that "the artist shall live the emotion he creates and not rise above it by means of his understanding," that "all art shall be moving," and so forth. It is possible to disagree with M. Benda. It is even possible to accuse him of an emotional approach, himself. But it is not possible to read his book without interest and profit.

A Native Argosy. By MORLEY CALLAGHAN: Scribner. \$2.50.

MORLEY CALLAGHAN, whose talent was demonstrated in "Strange Fugitive," published last summer, writes so much like Ernest Hemingway that the work of one might appear over the other's signature without surprising any but the most careful reader. And, if you care to turn to Sherwood Anderson's best stories, in any modern anthology, you will find there the immediate ancestor of both Callaghan and Hemingway, though, of course, the common family tree is much longer than that. In the finding of such resemblances there is no disparagement. Like most lively literary periods ours has developed certain well-marked schools of writing. A moderately critical reader can fit a new writer into his proper school upon seeing, if not his first, certainly his second book. To the radical or protesting school, Callaghan belongs. That school celebrates the common man as against the hero; tending to select his rudest examples and to find no woman chaste and no man strong. And it also, acting upon the debatable but by no means absurd belief that the English language is no longer the suitable medium of expression for our polyglot consciousness, aspires to crystallize the American tongue.

In "Strange Fugitive," Callaghan showed what he could do with a harsh, fierce narrative. The very violence of his theme as much as the undoubted skill with which he handled it attracted attention. In the fourteen short stories in "A Native Argosy," he tries an entirely able hand at the character-incident sketch; and in the two long stories, "An Autumn Penitent" and "In His Own Country," he writes sombre, slow-moving tragedy and ironic comedy. His characters, situations and conflicts are typically American; and his style perfectly appropriate to them, compact, colloquial, hard, fresh and full of color. At present, his field, like Hemingway's, is limited—limited to the size of a peephole. But within it he is a master.

FRANCES LAMONT ROBBINS.

The Week's Reading

The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults. By WILLIAM GRAY AND RUTH MONROE: Macmillan. Published March 26. \$3.50.

ACCORDING to the findings of these investigators, as recorded in this extremely useful book, college graduates read two newspapers a day, three magazines a month and twenty books a

The Most Discussed Books

THIS list is compiled from the lists of the ten best-selling volumes sent us by wire by the following book-shops each week:

New York—Brentano's;
Rochester—Scrantom's, Inc.
Cleveland—Korner & Wood;
St. Louis—Scruggs, Vandevort, & Barney;
Denver—Kendrick Bellamy Company;
Houston—Teolin Pillot Company;
San Francisco—Paul Elder & Co.
Baltimore—Norman, Remington Company;
Kansas City—Emery Bird Thayer;
Atlanta—Miller's Book Store;
Los Angeles—Bullock's;
Chicago—Marshall Field & Co.;
Cincinnati—Stewart Kidd;
Portland, Oregon—J. K. Gill Company.

Fiction

The Bishop Murder Case, by S. S. Van Dine: Scribner. Philo Vance (by the Well-Dressed Man out of Noah Webster) and the long-suffering police solve some mathematical murders. Reviewed Feb. 27.

This Strange Adventure, by Mary Roberts Rinehart: Doubleday, Doran. The story of a woman's life against the changing background of the last half-century; a serious and sympathetic venture in the delineation of the American woman and her problems.

Mamba's Daughters, by Du Bose Heyward: Doubleday, Doran. A rich melodramatic story, the contrast of old and new Charleston and two memorable negro characters make this an interesting and moving novel. Reviewed Feb. 6.

The Case of Sergeant Grisha, by Arnold Zweig: Viking Press. Generally considered the best novel of the war. The story of a Russian prisoner and the lives on which his life impinged.

Expiation by Elizabeth: Doubleday, Doran and Co. This subtle, witty and urbane story of a woman who paid and paid is one of Elizabeth's best. Reviewed Feb. 16.

Non-Fiction

The Art of Thinking, by Abbé Dimnet: Simon and Schuster. A thoughtful Frenchman writes graciously and wisely of a lost art.

The Cradle of the Deep by Joan Lowell: Simon and Schuster. This is an amusing yarn, said to be autobiographical, of a girl brought up on a sailing vessel. Reviewed last week.

Elizabeth and Essex, by Lytton Strachey: Harcourt, Brace. A magnificent historical essay written in precise and living prose. Reviewed Dec. 26.

The Magic Island, by W. B. Seabrook: Harcourt, Brace. We hear that this vivid account of voodoo in Haiti should be taken with a grain of salt. It is lively reading for all that. Reviewed Jan. 9.

Believe It or Not, by Robert L. Ripley: Simon and Schuster. Discussable, no doubt, but not as literature.

year; and they read selectively. And grade-school graduates seldom read books through and swallow all that the papers tell them. More people are reading all the time, and so much is being published that all this reading may have a profound effect on American social life, "if desirable in type and intelligently read." The fact is, it already has a profound effect, desirable

and intelligently read or not. This book about what adult Americans read, and why, should be in the libraries of every one interested both in the publication and distribution of reading matter and in the welfare of his fellows.

Into the Wind. By RICHARD WARREN HATCH: Macmillan. \$2.00. Published March 26. Reviewed by J. DANA TASKER.

TWO MILE a century ago was a typical New England coast town. On the farms there was enough drudgery to breed hatred of life, and in the shipyards and the harbor there was enough romance to inspire ambition. As the eldest son, Young John Bradford was expected to assume his father's place on the farm. But he rebelled against the idea, as Bradfords before him had seldom done. When he finally signed on for a whaling trip, he discovered that the life of the sea was hard and bitter, no more desirable than the routine he had tried to escape. After deserting the ship, it was a long year later before his pride would allow him to return home. There eventually he married and settled down, dividing his time between the farm and the shipyards, gradually assuming his inevitable place in the family that it was his duty to perpetuate.

In thus molding his principal character half according to the historic truth of the soil and half according to the timeless spell of the sea, Mr. Hatch seizes upon a fundamental quality in both early and present day New England life. The whole effect of "Into the Wind" absorbs the infrequent evidence that it is a first novel.

Babes and Sucklings. By PHILIP WYLIE: Knopf. Published March 29. \$2.50. Reviewed by E. M. BENSON.

THIS BOOK is as vibrant as a plucked string. It has real honest-to-goodness *joie de vivre* in its vitals. Philip Wylie does for the American novel what Philip Barry is doing for the American stage. He is a New Yorker to his shoestrings: brilliant, extraordinarily wise, lusty and honest about emotions and ideas, sardonic but never excoriating. He divests his characters of their motives as a child undresses a doll. What you have left are men and women stark naked quivering before you. The dynamic grandeur, the wholesome gallantry of Michael; the vile, feline and nefarious Gerry; their friends. With-