

►► The Leisure Arts ◄◄

Speaking of Books—The Theatre—The Movies

The Week's Reading

The New American Caravan. Edited by ALFRED KREYMBORG, LEWIS MUMFORD, PAUL ROSENFELD: Macaulay. \$3.50.

THE PURPOSE of the *American Caravan* is admirable. The work of unestablished writers is published; and by the very fact that these comparatively unknown authors have not been tempted to conform to the narrow requirements of success, their efforts should be sufficiently genuine both in conception and in execution to define the real trend of literature. Given the unusual opportunity of selecting material for such a book, the editors have had a natural tendency (in their anxiety to present an accurate picture of transition) to mistake the exotic for that which is simply and definitely new. That often happens in *The New Caravan*, and it unfortunately prejudices the general impression of the volume.

One of the principal contributors, Stanley J. Kunitz, pleads as follows in the last stanza of one of his poems:

Keep my soul to ravage,
O keep it savage,
Preserve it lean with hunger-
ing,

So may the lean bird sing.

If we were more intent on preaching a sermon, this passage might provide an inspiring text. For many of the Caravan writers have tried painfully to keep their souls savage and lean!

In the work which may be considered to be on the safe side of the exotic the principal theme is readjustment, the chief emotion is the desire to be free of restlessness, and the approach is almost entirely intellectual. Since there is neither harmony nor logic in the universe—not even stability—these new realists are making an exhaustive study of the processes of adjustment. The problem is so complex that they are attempting to solve it in sections, examining a single detail at a time. An extreme example of this method is a bio-

graphy, "Tracing Life With a Finger;" it is by Erskine Caldwell, and consists of thirty-eight unconnected progressive episodes.

Few, if any, of the other prose efforts are worthy of mention. A brain storm of no slight proportions is described by E. E. Cummings, and there is a long technical essay (which some readers

less uncertainty which is the keynote of the modern tendency in literature. But for the most part these poems are conservatively patterned. They are generally sober in theme, imaginative, direct in language, full of new metaphors, and rational. Marjorie Allen Seiffert, John Gould Fletcher, and David Carter have each contributed a fine short narrative; and Helen Pearce has done some commendable descriptive lyrics for the book. By far the cleverest and most entertaining verses are in Wallace Gould's "To Emily," a commentary on five important American poets. The editors wisely included this in the volume, for it typifies another, though minor, trend. In doing so they accounted for practically every new development in the contemporary movement.

John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist. By EDWIN MUIR: The Viking Press. \$3.50.

PRACTICALLY no authentic information is available on the first half of John Knox's life. Out of the documentary evidence remaining from the second half, Edwin Muir has constructed a convincing portrait of a religious fanatic whose vehemence and consistency of purpose made him one of the heroic figures of the Reformation.

On a limited amount of historical fact the author has built a strong case. Knox suffered a great deal, and in turn he brought misery into the lives of thousands. He pursued power relentlessly, and achieved it. Women sought spiritual guidance from him, and he rescued them from their consciences. His profound certainty of Election to God's chosen and his consequent delusion about his own prophetic powers enabled him to hide, even from himself, many ignoble and unheavenly qualities. In fact, there was nothing either in his private life or in his public career to contradict his being an interesting subject for psychological research.

This provocative and sometime informative book contains an appendix



Illustration by Herman Post in "Cheri"
by Colette (A. & C. Boni)

will no doubt find very interesting) by Yvor Winters on "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit Through the Poetry, Mainly French and American, Since Poe and Baudelaire." Also, there is a play by Paul Green, a folk fantasy in acts and interludes with music and dumb-show. Most of the fiction has a subjective quality which makes it considerably more like an article or a scientific report than a human interest story.

The poetry is better; in many instances it is remarkably good. Here, too, we find self-pity and morbidity, the most common manifestations of the rest-

which deals with the influence of Knox upon his native country, ending on this note; "What Knox really did was to rob Scotland of all the benefits of the Renaissance." If the great Protestant reformer could have heard this final judgment, he doubtless and straightway would have transferred the responsibility from himself to God, finding justification somewhere in his convenient and terrible Old Testament. He used to find this method of procedure most successful.

Indian Earth. By WITTER BYNNER: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

WITTER BYNNER has spent the last twelve years contemplating the pagan beauty of ancient civilizations. From China where he has been translating an anthology of native verse, he has returned frequently to his beloved American Southwest where he has written for *Indian Earth* several colorful "Pueblo Dances" and a group of dreams and reminiscences, quiet poems inspired by the Lake Chapala district in Mexico.

Throughout the book the selection of material indicates a deep appreciation of poetic values; and the treatment, especially of the short descriptive lyrics, suggests an Oriental influence. What at first appears to be an unstudied directness of expression—almost a series of factual statements—is in reality a deliberate condensation of thought and emotion into a delicate prism of words. And at the end of each of the Chapala poems an unexpected idea is introduced—one which in retrospect determines the whole significance of the mood. Thus a simple experience is made important by a final qualification:

But the blind guitarist was centuries back in Asia,
With a moon in his hand and with mango-lidded eyes.
And a sunset is made effective by telling how Montezuma

... setting on his brow the level turquoise,
Walked with flamingo feathers down the world.

Of the sustained narratives "A Dance for Rain at Cochiti," reprinted from an earlier volume, and "A Dance for Christ" are the most successful. Both of these explain the racial theme of *Indian Earth* and intensify the general impression of pagan beauty; but they lack the charm of the more frag-

mentary songs with their succession of memorable pictures.

J. DANA TASKER

Modesta. By G. B. STERN. Knopf. \$2.50.

FEW CONTEMPORARY writers are as competent as G. B. Stern to build up an amusing and airy tale on a fundamental truth of human nature. Her superstructures are often of the stuff

The Most Discussed Books

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

BRENTANO'S, New York; SCRANTONS, INC., Rochester; KORNER & WOOD, Cleveland; SCRUGGS, VANDERVOORT & BARNEY, St. Louis; KENDRICK BELLAMY CO., Denver; TEOLIN PILOT CO., Houston; PAUL ELDER & CO., San Francisco; NORMAN REMINGTON CO., Baltimore; EMERY BIRD THAYER, Kansas City; MILLER'S BOOK STORE, Atlanta. BULLOCK'S, Los Angeles; MARSHALL FIELD & CO., Chicago; STEWART KIDD, Cincinnati; J. K. GILL, Co., Portland, Oregon.

Fiction

All Quiet on the Western Front, by Erich Maria Remarque, translated from the German by A. W. Wheen: Little Brown. A searching and sensitive story of the World War which shows what the common soldier thinks of it, whatever flag he follows. Reviewed June 5.

They Stooped to Folly, by Ellen Glasgow: Doubleday, Doran. With perfect and terrible detachment the author makes a comedy of dazzling brilliance and exquisite balance. Reviewed August 7.

The Galaxy, by Susan Ertz: Appleton. A book to sink your teeth into and read with a pleasure at once eager and tranquil. Reviewed August 7.

Roper's Row, by Warwick Deeping: Knopf. Against the press of novelists who would destroy the harmless illusions of readers, Warwick Deeping stands as champion. Reviewed August 7.

Hide in the Dark, by Frances Noyes Hart: Doubleday, Doran. The story holds the interest from first page to last. Reviewed August 21.

Non-Fiction

Henry the Eighth, by Francis Hackett: Horace Liveright. A masterly re-creation of a striking and important historical scene. Don't miss it. Reviewed April 10.

Mansions of Philosophy, by Will Durant: Simon and Schuster. Durant is good enough as a popular historian of philosophy but of small stature as a philosopher, himself. Reviewed June 19.

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

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

A Preface to Morals, by Walter Lippmann: Macmillan. The author analyzes brilliantly the dilemma in which the sensitive intellectual finds himself today and offers a philosophy of life for modern men. Reviewed May 8.

of light comedy but the foundations are solid as Gibraltar. Darwin was of the opinion that the most successful marriage was based on a slight inferiority of the woman to her husband. More recently biologists and certain writers on social questions like Ludovici have held that woman is actually made mis-

erable by well-intentioned efforts to raise her to man's level. With such premises Miss Stern tells her charming and wise story of Modesta, an Italian peasant girl, whose rich young American husband tries to make a lady of her, only to be despised for his pains. Fortunately Laurie Ferrier finds his mistake before it is too late and packs off the lovely little parvenu to a farm in her native land. For his wife's sake, Laurie becomes a peasant and he treats Modesta as proper peasants' wives are used to being treated. This seems normal and suitable to Modesta who begins to think her husband not such a poor creature after all. He, on his part, realizes with no little chagrin that his early chivalrous desire to marry Modesta and take her into a new world of ease and luxury was a form of vanity in himself, rather than any finer feeling. He understands that his attitude to his wife was patronizing and contemptuous in that it took no account of the sturdy qualities of her peasant soul. Actually he had rejected all the fine gifts she had brought to their marriage, in order to make a fashionable woman of her.

Modesta is a modern *Taming of the Shrew*, written with the author's usual sophistication, humor and essential truth. The denouement of the story is delightfully unconventional.

MARY SHIRLEY

Little Novels. By ARTHUR SCHNITZLER: Simon & Schuster. \$2.50.

THESE ARE REALLY short stories, not the novelettes with which American admirers of Schnitzler have been chiefly familiar. They are distinguished by the fastidious perfection of technique which has always characterized the author's work. Schnitzler scorns the superfluous, the extraneous. Nevertheless, we have the impression of something slightly out-moded. Most of these stories belong to an era which has passed, even though it be only a decade more or less since the old Vienna, "Wien, sterbende Märchenstadt," became history. In that lost time princes died rather frequently in the arms of their mistresses, duels were fought even outside operetta and men are known to have died on the field of honor, but the laces and letters of fair women of the day are already yellow with years. All these things have a charm somewhat autumnal and melancholy but it cannot be said that the genius of Schnitzler is