

fictions of a perfect knight, but he will ask questions and he will examine his own motives until they become so blurred, under intensive scrutiny, that they cease to move. He is the man of action encumbered by brains. The theme is cleverly handled, the style easy and agreeable, and the historic detail and description are good. But the book falls between two stools and is neither very good historical romance—the satirist never being concerned to discover or convey the atmosphere of the period of which he writes—nor very good satire, since it is too slow moving and tenuous as a novel; as a play it would probably have been sharper and wittier. There is a great deal of acrid humor in the book but not much of the wit of *The Road to Rome*.

"ALBERT GROPE," by F. O. Mann (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50). This novel is the September choice of the Book League of America. It is excellent imitation Dickens, minus the melodrama. Also, one must admit, minus the abiding magnetism of the Dickens characters. It is the story of a Cockney lad, son of a good Victorian charwoman, who makes a success of business but cannot learn his way about in the world. He is a touching and engaging character, and the odd people that he runs across in life, the absurd and pathetic things that he does fill up a longish book. As a novel, it is very leisurely reading, quaint, funny and soothing. Except for an occasional striving for effect in the handling of the freakish characters there is no sense of strain about the writing and the skilful handling of the prose is apt to slip by unnoticed. This novel should be read piecemeal and would lend itself to being read aloud. Many Dickens lovers will enjoy it. This particular one did, although she found it lacking in Dickensian gusto, and sometimes too obviously imitative.

FRANCES LAMONT ROBBINS.

Behind the Blurbs

THOSE who sigh for the good old days when knights were bold may become somewhat reconciled to modern life if they will cast an eye over *The English Mediaeval Feast*¹, wherein is described the sort of dish that used to be set before a king. Sixteenth century table manners were none too good, but sixteenth century cookery was worse. The cook's aim seems to have been so to disguise the flavor of the chief ingredients of a dish as to make its contents unrecognizable. We have room for only one sample. "Take great oysters and shell them; and

take the water of the oysters, and ale, and bread strained, and the water also, and put in a pot, and ginger, sugar, saffron, powdered pepper and salt, and let it boil well. Then put the oysters thereto, and serve it forth." The book contains a mass of information, much of it very interesting, on the foods and drinks that were available, the methods of preparing and serving them, and descriptions of many notable feasts taken from contemporary sources. *** When, in *The Penguin Pool Murder*², a dead man suddenly appeared in one of the tanks at the New York Aquarium, and was recognized through the glass by his wife, who was present with a boy friend, Inspector Piper felt that no further explanation was necessary. But Miss Withers, who was showing her class the wonders of the deep in that well-known institution at the time, thought differently. So she got a substitute to teach her class while she solved the mystery—and a very good job she made of it. Ingenious, and no more incredible than most. *** If you want to know exactly what the familiars did to 'em when they got them down in the dungeons of the Inquisition, read *The Pleasures of the Torture Chamber*³, which contains a chapter on the practices of that institution. Other chapters deal with ingenious atrocities of all sorts, from the comparatively pleasant stocks, to the wheel, the stake and the cross. It is not a pleasant book, nor one that you will care to read through at one sitting, but it is complete and authoritative. *** What happened when private detective Race Williams fell afoul of the Gorgon brothers is told swiftly and to the accompaniment of an almost continuous rattle of pistol shots, in *The Third Murderer*⁴. Race's job would have been easier if he had been able to figure out whether The Girl With The Criminal Mind, otherwise known as "The Flame," was trying to put him on the spot, or trying to keep him off it. It wasn't until the Gorgons

were finally subdued, and The Flame had fallen in flames at his feet, that he found out. The finale is quite satisfactory to all lovers of justice. *** *Tiger Valley*⁵ is a fine adventure story, laid in the Siamese jungle, where Foster and Grainger, teak-wallahs in charge of adjoining sections of forest, not only admire the same girl, but hate the same tigress. They make a bet as to which kills her first—the tigress, not the girl—and their subsequent efforts to win, in a country so terrorized by the man eater and her mate as to be deserted by all the natives, makes a very exciting story—a story all the more vivid for the author's evident knowledge of the country. *** *Viennese Novelettes*⁶, by Arthur Schnitzler, gathers under one cover *Fraulein Else*, *None But the Brave*, *Beatrice*, *Rhapsody* and *Daybreak*. Illustrated by Kurt Wiese, and with an excellent introduction by Dr. Otto Schinnerer, of Columbia. *** Mr. Barnwell was giving a party. But when Messrs Corleair, Willett and Harper arrived, he was quite alone except for a fatal wound in the back. How about that girl who was leaving when they came in? Harper chased her while the others stayed to admit the police, witness a second murder, and meet Lawyer Polhemus, who, while exploring the house, gets stabbed in the pantry. The subsequent activities of all these people make *The Penthouse Murders*⁷ an amusing yarn, whose speed quite acceptably excuses the insufficiently motivated action.

WALTER R. BROOKS.

5. By Reginald Campbell: Smith, \$2.00.
6. Simon & Schuster, \$3.50.
7. By Raymond Holden: Crime Club, \$1.00.

2. By Stuart Palmer: Brentano, \$2.00.
3. By John Swain: Dial, \$4.00.
4. By Carroll John Daly: Farrar & Rhinehart, \$2.00.



Illustration by Harrison Cady for "American Songs for Children" (Macmillan)

1. By William G. Mead: Houghton Mifflin, \$5.00.

Music

Notable New Recordings



SOME few columns back I seem to remember having noted in rather disparaging fashion the fact that Victor had employed the eminent American baritone, John Charles Thomas, to record *Home on the Range* and *Trees* as his initial efforts on their disks. I remarked that I preferred Vernon Dahlhart's unpretentious and more rhythmic version of the former and refrained from writing that, as for the latter, no matter how you slice it, etc. Well, picture my embarrassment on dropping in to a place where they sell Victor records to find that the Victor Company had since designated that record as the "Record of the Month in the Field of Great Music"! Say! How do you think that makes me feel as a critic? The only consolation is that compositions by Tchaikowsky, Chopin and Brahms were on the same Victor list and that others in the past have been so misguided as to consider them pretty good composers too, even when played by Albert Coates and Ignace Jan Paderewski.

My favorite violinist, Bronislaw Huberman, has changed his recording allegiance and now appears on Columbia records in a brilliant version of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*¹ with Ignaz Friedman at the piano. Maybe there are some who prefer lushness in their violinists and "interpretation" in their pianists, but if you want to hear what the composer wrote played with taste, accuracy and purity of tone, let me commend you to this Huberman-Friedman album. The fact that Huberman is none too strong physically is all that keeps him from being known to a great many more people as the fine artist that he is. For this same reason I hope that he will make many more records so that by means of the phonograph his fame will continue to spread as it should. As to the *Kreutzer Sonata* it is surely unnecessary to say more than that the present rendition is all that it should be. Congratulations, Columbia, on a fine job!

O. C.-T.

1. Columbia Masterworks Album, No. 160.

From the Life

The Top Flight

ALL THE STAIRS went down. It seemed to him, when he was three years old and able to think about life, that this was the only thing he had known always—this and his mother's face. That was how the world began; himself, and his mother in a cloud of light on the very top step, dipping down—down—turning and floating—down—down—whirling, fluttering—down at last among the cushions of the baby carriage. That was life.

Later, he knew better about almost everything. The stairs went down but not as lightly as before. Sometimes he was caught up by the middle and suspended awkwardly above the great abyss; sometimes he was joggled and squeezed unpleasantly as they went down; sometimes his mother drew a sharp breath when they reached the bottom and dropped him upon his shocked feet with a cry of God! Such stairs. But soon she had him by the hand and they had plunged into the noise outside, where miraculously enough the baby carriage had dropped away from him the way his shoes fell off at night. He could almost hear the wheels rolling and clattering away among the bigger wheels and the sound almost filled him with pain. But he would only clutch his mother's hand the tighter, and run a little faster, taking four steps to her one instead of three, and that would make him strong again.

For now that he had learned to move about upon his feet instead of on wheels, he had become enormously strong. This in itself was a great excitement, but it was nothing to the excitements that followed. But the most staggering discovery was the stairs.

For the stairs went up as well as down. He tried it out first on his hands and knees, with his mother encouraging him from behind. Then he found that he could stand beside the stair rail and by closing his eyes tight and blowing out his face, could pull himself up—one—and—and one. By the time he was three he could climb them all; hundreds and thousands of them! And presently his mother never watched him even, but made her way up slowly in front, with all the bundles.

So it happened that he discovered for himself one day, the top flight.

He had become so strong that he never even noticed when he reached his own front door, which had blown shut

in the wind. He went right on and was four steps high before his mother could put down the bundles on the kitchen table, open the door, and call him in a frightened voice. "Where are you? Where are you?—Never go up there!" she ended sharply as she caught sight of him and picked him off the stairs like a moth.

"Why?" he asked, struggling; and, on his feet again looking up into the darkness that almost hid a plain blank door, "What is it? What is up there?"

"Nothing," said his mother crossly.

"There's nothing up there at all. That's why you mustn't go."

So he thought about it. When his own front door was open he would slip out a step and look, and think some more. Everything had always been down the stairs. What could possibly be up? Nobody ever came down those steps.

Unless it was at night. He tried to picture it—a door—that went to no place. You turned the knob and opened it—and there was nothing. What was nothing? Was it the sky? Was it the dark? Was it a sound?

He learned the habit of running to the foot of the top flight and looking up, whenever his own door was open. That is how he came to notice one morning that the strange blank door, the big one at the top, was open.

It was open so little that scarcely a chink of light could be seen, but that thin strip of brightness cut the dark like a silver knife. It filled him with terror and hurt him in his throat, but he was up the stairs before he knew it. The heavy door shut behind him.

All day they looked for him. The neighbors, who knew the small figure by heart, ran to the park benches—looked along the river's edge—darted into shops and out again. A little boy had disappeared.

When the sky was turning dark and inscrutable and the lights of the city striking defiantly upwards, a tall policeman in a blue coat stood at the top of the last flight and pushed open a heavy door. Out of the darkness a small figure rose and came towards him, across the roof, slowly and with dignity.

"Well, what you been doing here?" asked the policeman.

But the little boy only lifted his eyes—eyes full of chimney stacks and stars, of loneliness and exaltation, of confidence and excitement—and looked at him. He would never again believe that story about nothing.

IBBY HALL.