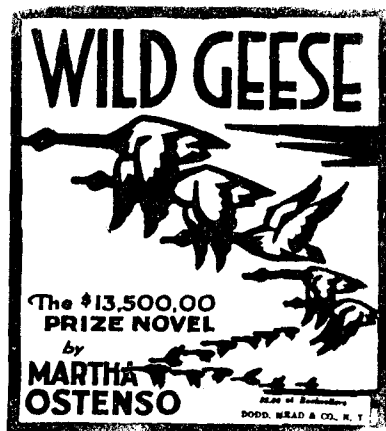


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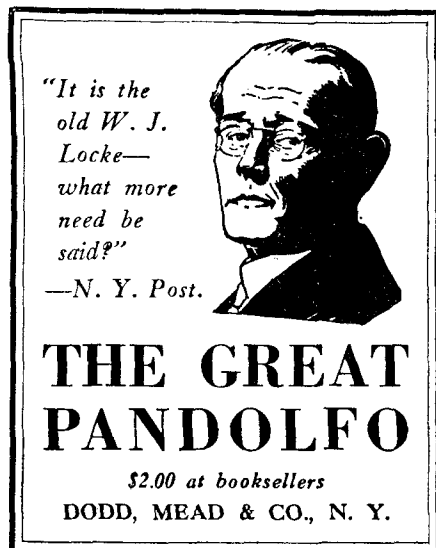
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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Belles Lettres

ESSAYS ON JEWISH LIFE AND THOUGHT. The Letters of BenAmmi. Second Series. New York: Longmans, Green. 1925.

Faith cannot be compartmentalized. It will not be contained by any walls reared by impartiality. When one sets out to discuss religious questions in their cosmic aspects one may do it as theologian and frankly turn apologist or propagandist. Or one may write as historian and subject one's belief to the ruthless domination of scientific objectivity. But to treat religion historically, not to say scientifically, is to give to many beliefs the semblance of facts and to invade susceptibilities incapable of distinguishing between the historical and the metaphysical.

It is precisely this disability that unfits BenAmmi for the task of explaining to non-Jews the essence of Jewish life and thought. He is too much of a Talmudist not to perceive the lacunae in the scholarship of Gentile historians and too exultingly Jewish not to extol at all times the ripe wisdom of the Rabbinical commentators. Moreover, the cylinder of his telescopes restricts his vision to the sectors of life predominantly Jewish. These "Essays on Jewish Life and Thought" first appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle*. There are signs a plenty that they were written for a public benevolently inclined both to the author and to his thesis; that this knowledge caused him, unconsciously perhaps, to waiver in his allegiance to the ideal of genial tolerance. He alternates graciously between concession and denial. He waxes satiric at the "Jew-haters who, in very wickedness, have accused the Jews of reciting Kol Nidre on the eve of the Day of Atonement in order to free themselves from promises of all kinds made to Gentiles," claiming that this rite gives the Jew "a feeling of certainty that he had been released of the binding power of any rash words he may utter in the coming year." Yet he permits the stigma of perfidy to attach to the Catholic Church because "Medieval Canon Law specifically declares that an oath which is to the detriment of the Church is not binding."

It may be questioned whether the manner of the inspired rhapsodist can avail much against the implacable gabardine-spitter. One rather inclines to the view that BenAmmi will be well advised to cling to the rôle of historian and continue to describe in his delightfully anecdotal way the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Jewish Contributions to the Stage and to Music, Messiahs in History and a Savior of Judaism. Nor is he less effective in the Essay on Semitism in which he puts to rout very neatly such pseudo-anthropologists as Ripley and Topinard; the paper on "Pharisees," though mildly disputatious marshals adroitly facts and arguments and leads to the conviction that "All in all, the Pharisees taught a high standard of conduct, a high conception of God, and a high social code. It is a thousand pities that their designation should have come to mean the very opposite of what they stood for."

THAMYRIS OR IS THERE A FUTURE FOR POETRY? by R. C. TREVELYAN. Dutton. 1925. \$1.

One of the latest small volumes in Dutton's "To-Day and To-Morrow Series," which has rightly earned a reputation for its discussion of contemporary affairs and the future in such former volumes as J. B. S. Haldane's "Daedalus," Bertrand Russell's "Icarus," Schiller's "Tantalus," and so on. Mr. Trevelyan's work discusses the possible future of poetry, and is dedicated to the memory of Oswald Sickert. It is

undoubtedly suggestive, dealing at first with poetic technique and then essaying, in a deprecating way, "to suggest future possibilities by drawing attention to the lessons which we can still learn from the past." Whether one is wholly in agreement or not with the attitude of Mr. Trevelyan, his essay is well-informed, and his argument for a fixed metrical base underlying irregularities, for a true knowledge of quantity, and so on, is clearly reasoned. He admits that "the dissociation of poetry from music and intonation has to a great extent diminished the immediate potency of its sensuous and emotional appeal; but," he says, "I have argued that the new medium of spoken verse, although it may have grown more similar to prose, is yet very far from being identical with it, either formally, or in the nature of its subject-matter." In this conclusion our own observation certainly sustains him.

Mr. Abercrombie and Mr. Bottomley are practically his only citations from among contemporary poets, but this, of course, gives no indication of his knowledge of contemporary work, though it seems to us from his generalizations, that his tendency is to underrate the amount of good work done in our time.

RUMINATIONS. By ARTHUR McDOWELL. Houghton Mifflin. 1925. \$2.

Mr. Arthur McDowell, an English essayist of some charm and originality, evidently writes to satisfy his occasional need for authorship and not as a matter of professional habit or necessity. Thus he has chosen, gracefully enough, the essay form, and in it he is never without something to say. He shares with the reader, as it were, his private leisure, meditating aloud in a prose that is by no means commonplace though it has not yet achieved real distinction. For these "Ruminations," whether they concern Cows, Sundays, Autobiography, or Travellers' Joy, really are essays and not mere middle articles, those poor modern substitutes for our old Lamb-Hazlitt, or Belloc-Chesterton fare. Mr. McDowell meditates and ponders; we ruminate with him and witness the process leading up to final digestion. He can clothe poetry in his prose and capture the atmosphere of some well-remembered scene. The essay "An Afternoon in the Marshes" is admirable in both respects. It is an additional merit in the author that he can divert his subject so skilfully from large into small channels of interest. So in this essay he brings us back from marsh to earth by discovering the loss of a banknote during the rumination. The opportunity for a change of mood and some discursions is excellently taken. Elsewhere Mr. McDowell pieces his material together with the hand and eye of the artist. Especially delightful is his essay contrasting and comparing two tours of Scotland, those respectively of Dr. Johnson and the Wordsworth party. This is the best essay in the volume and the rest are so nearly as good that Mr. McDowell would deserve an honorable place in any modern anthology of essays.

OLD LAMPS FOR NEW. By CLAUDE BRACDON. Knopf. 1925. \$3.

Most contemporary theosophical writings move like dim ferryboats chugging through the fog, but the same cannot be said of the style of Mr. Claude Bragdon. Perhaps the clarity of his mysticism is due to his creative work in architecture and design, although he himself would certainly insist that the casual influence was in the other direction. At any rate, it is only occasionally that he falls into the jargon of his school, as in the allegorical interpretations of "Ham-

(Continued on next page)

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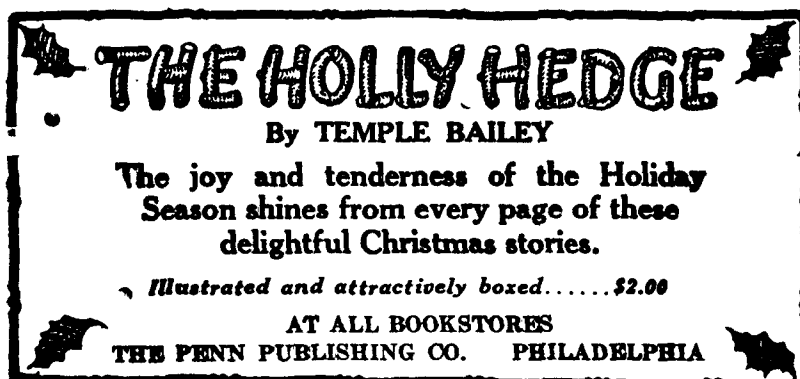
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The New Books

Belles Lettres

(Continued from preceding page)

let" and "Othello" in the present volume, or in a few passages where his reverence for Madame Blavatsky—as annoying as is always the admiration of a strong head for a weak one—leads him to emulate that celebrated lady's unctuous verbiage. For the most part, Mr. Bragdon's work is that of a highly organized artistic intelligence, sincerely and deeply religious, speaking not by rote but from an experience genuinely sensitive to cosmic beauty.

"Old Lamps for New" is a collection of new and old essays which present the familiar doctrines of theosophy in a most attractive form. All modern philosophies—neo-realism, neo-idealism, Bergsonianism, and the rest—are laboring hard to incorporate Einstein and Relativity; perhaps theosophy, though less modern than the others, has less difficulty than any of them in this task; at least, the essay "Time is a dream" is one of the most satisfactory in Mr. Bragdon's volume. There are also many notable sayings upon art, such as "the creator of beauty is subjectively a mathematician whether he knows aught of mathematics or not." Should modern civilization go to pieces, theosophy is the only popular religion which would without difficulty survive the change. In that event, Mr. Bragdon would undoubtedly come to be considered one of the great writers of the present period. Meanwhile, without so considering him, and without agreeing with more than a fraction of what he says, we may still welcome and thoroughly enjoy his work.

PORTRAITS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. Historic and Literary. By C. SAINTE-BEUVE. Translated by Katharine P. Wormeley and George Burnham Ives. Putnam, 2 vols.

The most famous work of Sainte-Beuve is already available in so many editions that this new collection and translation may, at first sight, appear unnecessary. But the translator has done her work so well that the two beautiful volumes, with their wealth of illustrations, mostly reproductions of old steel engravings, will tempt many readers to substitute them for the familiar editions. The editors have taken some justifiable liberties with their author. The portraits are compiled from the "Causeries du Lundi," the "Portraits de Femmes" and the "Portraits Littéraires." In some instances they have combined separate essays on the same person, avoiding the inevitable repetitions by excision. There was not such a good case for excluding Sainte-Beuve's "discussions on style" in which some of his best literary criticism is contained. But these volumes, when all is said, contain the cream of the author's work. It is as easy to over-rate Sainte-Beuve as it is to under-rate him and criticism has been fairly divided in both respects as to his critical ability. He owes more than the famous critics usually owe to the work of journeymen *littérateurs*. Like Augustine Birrell he writes best when he has some book on which to base his essay, although the book, very often, is not mentioned in the essay it provokes. There was no intention of concealment in this habit. It must never be forgotten that Sainte-Beuve, though he was a critic, was first of all a *causeur*. A fine test of any man's critical power is to examine what he has to say about an alien literature. Sainte-Beuve passes this test with his colors flying, for his opinions and dissertations on English literature and English characters are sounder than his countrymen have generally written. The essay on Lord Chesterfield, for instance, is a great achievement for a Frenchman. For though Chesterfield had many Gallic traits in his character, he was essentially a product of Eighteenth Century England. Moreover, on account of his "quarrel" with Dr. Johnson, history has tended to overlook many of his finest qualities, his breadth of mind, his tolerance and intellectual equipment. Sainte-Beuve is not distracted by any such popular misunderstandings. He sees to the heart and mind of his man and draws an extremely sensitive portrait against the background of the Eighteenth Century. As a commentary on the greatest figures in the France of that cycle these two volumes would be hard to surpass. The translators have employed a clean, nervous English throughout and the volumes are beautifully printed and bound.

ESSAYISTS PAST AND PRESENT. Collected by J. B. PRIESTLEY. Dial, 1925. \$1.50.

This is a collection of essays from the days of Steele and Addison to our own time of Robert Lynd and Hillaire Belloc. Mr. Priestley has made his selection with an effort to stimulate taste by giving samples of the delectable dishes to be found at the English literary board. Eschewing more weighty material he has confined his choice to the "personal essay," keeping in mind De Quincey's distinction between Literature of Knowledge and Literature of Power. Among the contents are Swift's "A Country Visit," Lamb's "Imperfect Sympathies," Hazlitt's "Merry England," Thackeray's "De Finibus," Stevenson's "The Lantern-Bearers," and Chesterton's "A Piece of Chalk." It is a delightful and scholarly volume and serves to remind the reader of an easy and gentlemanly method of composition that is fast passing out of fashion.

MEN, WOMEN AND COLLEGES. By Le Baron R. Briggs. Houghton Mifflin. \$1.50.
SILHOUETTES. By Sir Edmund Gosse. Scribners. \$2.75.
FALSTAFF AND OTHER SHAKESPEAREAN TOPICS. By Albert H. Tolman. Macmillan. \$2.50.

Biography

HENRY MONTAGU BUTLER: Master of Trinity College, Cambridge (1886-1918). A Memoir by His Son. (J. R. M. BUTLER). Longmans, Green. 1925. \$4.50.

Quite apart from its high merits as a biography this book may be read for its very entertaining pictures of university life and politics in Cambridge, England, from 1886 to 1918. That Dons are not necessarily dull, as the old undergraduate burthen goes, is once more disproved by the life story of one of them, also one of the most famous of his own times. Butler came to Trinity after his short occupancy of the Deanery of Gloucester. Thus the son's book takes up the biographical tale almost where Mr. Edward Graham, the Harrow biographer, left off. As Headmaster of Harrow for twenty-six years (he was appointed at the exceptionally early age of twenty-six) Butler's experience was not altogether unsuited to the duties of the new appointment. But where at Harrow he had been an autocrat, as his position demanded, at Trinity he was "all that a wise man ever wishes to be," head of a constitutional government. The accounts, with which this biography is crowded, of his dealings with the Fellows and Council of his College are of so many little masterpieces of tact and skill in managing difficult affairs. Butler's literary tastes, his speeches, conversations, and even his sermons are mellowed and gracious, like one of his own wines; to spend an hour among them in the pages of his biography is a delightful experience.

HAIL AND FAREWELL. By GEORGE MOORE. Revised Edition. Doran. 1925. \$7.50.

This, the juiciest, the wittiest, and the most characteristic of all George Moore's books is reissued in two volumes, with a new preface introducing and reviewing the work. Mr. Moore discovers that, as with the pre-Raphaelites, it is nature not art that produced his masterpiece, the unsurpassable human nature of Ireland; indeed, no writer could add to the humors of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and AE, when in their Celtic poses. It is a witty preface to a witty book, and if Mr. Moore insists upon dropping Whistler's last name as unworthy of a man with McNeill for his middle name, he takes no more liberty there than everywhere in the impudent and delightful book which he reintroduces.

THE TRAGIC LIFE OF VINCENT VAN GOGH. By LOUIS PIERARD. Translated by Herbert Garland. Houghton Mifflin. 1925.

To what is generally known about Van Gogh M. Piérard has contributed a thorough investigation of the painter's efforts as an evangelist among the Belgian coal miners, with some additional information concerning his artistic beginnings at Antwerp. The rest is a rather heavy-handed compilation from familiar authorities. The value of the revelations is obviously relative to the reader's attitude toward poor Vincent. The cult will naturally rejoice in new evidence increasing the mass of energetic frenzy formerly on record. Others may feel that heaping up already abundant evidence that Vincent was always nearly mad merely tends to confuse what is unimportant—his madness, with what