

Books of Special Interest

The Short Story

O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD:
PRIZE STORIES OF 1927. New York:
Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1928.

Reviewed by GERTRUDE MORRISON

THE short story comes into its own for no better reasons than those which have made William Allen White and Brander Matthews fearful that the Great American Novel never can be written, "Partly because America is of so many parts, castes, conditions, locations, minds, backgrounds, hearts—but it is possible to tell of American life, all of it, and that through the short story."

In the O. Henry Memorial Award: "Prize Stories of 1927," geographically the range is from the South, where one-third of the stories find their setting, to New York, South Dakota, Isle Brevelle, "where the French mulattoes live," to France itself; from a church filled with frightened colored people to a room jammed "full to overflowing with curled cropped heads, with ivory arms and shoulders, with silk and lace and chiffon, with legs," from hearts whose owners take meticulous care that they syncopate only to the emotions aroused in a Night Club to one—"The Scarlet Woman"—"who had such faith in love that she sacrificed all her life to it."

The story-reading public is becoming critical. Writers must now serve what they and their anthologists have created. A step toward initiation into technique itself is achieved when, in the Introduction, the Committee points out the contending forces that have made each story possible.

This volume, more than any preceding it in the series, commands the attention of the technician. In "Child of God," (Roark Bradford), which receives first prize, there is a break, but so skilfully handled its fracture would have to be X-rayed to certainty. A poor colored devil goes straight from the trap beneath his feet to his God, only to be told by Him to go back and finish the speech the hangman interrupted. "I jes' wanner say I ain't got no hard feelins agin nobody an' I don't want nobody

to has no hard feelins again me. An' I wants to fee you all in heaven."

A year from now, if one looks over the titles, with the possible exception of "Child of God," the stories that will jump first from his memory will be "The Killers" (Ernest Hemingway; Second Prize), and "Night Club" (Katharine Brush). If their concise brevity renders them dynamic, no less does psychology lend its aid. We have the lure of the unfinished. The Killers will get that man. But when and where? What's ahead of Babe, eloping from a Night Club with a man she hasn't known a week? The girl with the scissors, will she use them against her escort?

There is a similarity of theme in Mr. Bellah's "Fear" and in "He Man" (Marjory Stoneham Douglas)—a type of title not to be encouraged just as the latter, half sea, half aviation, links up "Fear" (aviation) and Bill Adams's "Jukes" (sea). Each of the three needs pruning.

Is this the year of the negro in fiction? Three from Mr. O'Brien's Year Book, four from the O. Henry volume; year after year the American negro appears in the short story, usually for lust or for religion; and sometimes, as in Mr. Fauset's "Symphonies," the one almost runs into the other. Up to this year I have contended that the negro must still have a big reserve of native sweetness, so little has it been drawn on to furnish fiction! But the Judge's "six months" time and again has not taken the sweetness out of Bulldog any more than the shadow of the gallows got it out of Willie; nor is simplicity out of the Singing Women; nor integrity of character out of one who "Done Got Over."

"With Glory and Honor" (Elisabeth Cobb Chapman), is the story of a Jew reverting to race and, through his singing, interpreting his people even as in "Monkey Motions" (Eleanor Mercein Kelley) a negro measures his folk in a dance. He is vastly more than one of Carl Van Vechten's negroes performing the Charleston. With the exception of Julió Desnoyers dancing the Tango to a world that was "measuring its intelligence by the agility of its feet," and

he who juggled before Our Lady, the dancers of fiction have usually been women.

It is pleasant to meet Ruth Suckow's "Little Girl from Town" if for no other reason—there are others—than that she is a little girl. Children are about as scarce in anthologies of the short story as in churches. "Four Dreams of Gram Perkins" (Ruth Sawyer) is a story of a self-appointed layer of a ghost. It could have sprung only from a soil once hovered over by the witches of New England.

Last in the volume, in some ways least, is "Shades of George Sand"—the cleverest title in the book. But—shades of anybody!—are we to believe that a girl growing up in a dingy grocery in South Dakota, hedged in by a fat, unimaginative mother, a self-effacing father, a spoiled brother, uses such words as "bayadere—colubrine—rachitic"? Yet, when her moist-handed, mouse-haired lover says, quite as surprisingly, "You've no right to cover up such burnean loveliness—You're epical, we get

"Eburnean? What was that? (I had to look it up myself.) Matilda gasped. He talked like a book." Then the author, Ellen DuPois Taylor, robs her characters of their verbal distinction by showing us that she, too, has a vocabulary. She has to answer for father's hair *fimbriating* his bald head. 'Tis as improbable as when, in the good old days of Augusta Evans Wilson, her heroine sat on the marble floor of the library reading Sanskrit until three in the morning!

A Travel Journal

KING COBRA. By HARRY HERVEY.
New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation. 1927. \$4.

Reviewed by MARGARET MEAD

"FOR many months I had been living in a book—the book of my adventures in quest of a dead city," says Harry Hervey, and it is his peculiar quality of always seeing the present as part of a book, a book half-written, partly obliterated, filled with unread, half decipherable paragraphs, which gives "King Cobra" much of its undoubted charm. Of great service also is Mr. Hervey's unswerving and complete enthusiasm which made the name of Angkor a satisfactory symbol of romance from the atlas on the nursery floor to the actuality of the ruined temples in the heart of Indo-China. And there is still one other item of his special equipment for this kind of storytelling which Mr. Hervey shares with children and the primitive peoples whom he describes so sympathetically. His thinking draws no line between the animate and the inanimate, images from one order of experience serve perfectly in a different order. It is without effort that he sees the jungle one moment as a vindictive monster, the next as an annihilating river beneath which a whole civilization drowns.

The book is given form and climax by the search for an unchronicled, ruined city, Wat Phu, whose tale he had heard from the lips of a stranger in a bar in Singapore. But three-quarters of the volume deals with the journey, with Saigon and its ghostly reminiscences of Paris, and the spiritual miscegenation of Indo-China and the French, with Angkor Thom, and the long trip up the Me-Kong, punctuated with disaster because the coolie smoked too much opium at the wheel. No smallest detail is recorded for itself alone. All are symbols, of the decay of one régime, the slow tortuous birth of another, the triumph of one people over another, the substitution of a religion of peace for a religion of death, of the bitter landmarks which strew the path of western empire; each present fact trails behind it a train upon which its past or future implications are delicately, unpedantically traced.

It is an exciting background, the history of the Khmers and their great mushroom kingdom in Cambodia which vanished in the course of three centuries; this kingdom which a Chinese ambassador describes in the zenith of its power in 1295, and a Portuguese explorer found a heap of ruins in 1570. Mr. Hervey knows his history, or quite enough of it to make each step in his journey significant. His book is the tale of what one man, and he an exceedingly romantic one, saw and thought.

This is a record for those who wish the kingdoms of fantasy bodied forth in terms of history and geography, built upon the data of actual experience, but stripped of all dulness and infused with the spirit of unflagging romance.

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By ERNEST H. WILKINS

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Books of Special Interest

A Man of Gusto

HENRY THOREAU, THE COSMIC YANKEE. By J. BROOKS ATKINSON. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927.

Reviewed by HARRY HAYDEN CLARK
Middlebury College

HERE is an attractive little book which should lead many who have wrongly considered Thoreau a "sulker" to catch Mr. Atkinson's contagious enthusiasm for the cosmic Yankee's "enjoyment of life," the "tremendous gusto of his career," and "the lambent flame of beauty in his writing." In the same "economical, deep-bitted strokes" he attributes to Thoreau, the author etches the portrait of the "poet-naturalist-philosopher" in his first chapter, and then he proceeds—in a delightfully pungent, sharp-edged, salty style—to present Thoreau adventuring on life and to discuss his relations with Emerson, his "message," his books, his humor, his "Journals," and finally the success of his philosophy as manifested in his testimony regarding his own happiness. Readers of the ardent and merited praise of the "Journals"—once so formidable in their many volumes—will be glad to avail themselves of "The Heart of Thoreau's Journals," lately published, admirably selected and edited by another lover of Thoreau—Odell Shepard. Mr. Atkinson finds that "the essence of his thinking was never more apt than it is now." . . . "If in the course of time, we reconcile our instrumentalism with the individual man, if we reclaim the individual from the jumble of material living and discover the true sources of happiness, inevitably we shall go to Thoreau for the vision."

Mr. Atkinson's book is in general a sympathetic, admirably written, but somewhat unsound introduction to Thoreau; it may antidote earlier criticism in stressing the zest of his life and the occasional lyric beauty of his writing. It is, however, somewhat one-sided in dealing with Thoreau's thought, especially his all-important attitude toward nature. Was he a pantheist? It is misleading to insist so strongly that he was "a foster-child of nature," that his "supreme message . . . was merely the enjoyment of life," that he longed for "union with nature," that the chapter on Economy is simply "exhilarating shadow-boxing," and that "the poetry and the fun of the adventure remain the dominant characteristics of Walden." Now the Concord seer was a good deal more than an overgrown Boy Scout. What is needed here is balancing, an ability to see both sides of the man, or that penetrating discrimination displayed by Professor Norman Foerster in his epoch-making study of "Nature in American Literature." Mr. Atkinson very rightly pays homage to Thoreau's nobility of character, but without perceiving how that nobility was acquired.

Let Thoreau testify to his own humanism. Instead of worshipping nature as "the guardian" of his "moral being" as the youthful Wordsworth did, instead of saying that we may "unhesitatingly commit the guidance of life to instinct" as Schiller did, the cosmic Yankee declares: "What is peculiar in the life of a man consists not in his obedience, but his opposition, to his instincts. In one way or another he strives to live a *super-natural* life." He is, I believe, a seeker of moral perfection in his way, as the New England Puritans were in their way. Scorning the romantic notion of natural goodness, he is "conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled." Passionately devoted as he is to the simplicity and beauty of nature, he is forever conscious that "we are not wholly involved in nature," he is aware of "a certain doubleness," and like St. Paul he distinguishes sharply between "the law of the members" and "the law of the spirit," between Emerson's "law for things" and "law for man." The child of nature can say, "Nature is hard to be overcome, *but she must be overcome.*" The chapter on "Higher Laws" is an extended treatment of the necessity of conquering nature, instinct, and our animal inheritance in order that we may abide by the higher laws of man. Had Mr. Atkinson not ignored Thoreau's intellectual heritage and his relation to the Romantic Movement, the contrast between Thoreau and the romanticists would have been obvious. The "naturalist" confesses he cannot even think in the midst of nature: "True, out-of-doors my thought is commonly drowned. . . . I expand more surely in my chamber."

It is in his tendency to ignore that side of Thoreau which I have been illustrating—I think the nobler side—that Mr. Atkinson invites the charge of presenting an attractive but somewhat unfaithful portrait of the man who is perhaps America's soundest thinker.

On Education

WHY STOP LEARNING? By DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER'S interest in education has run like an under-current beneath the surface of her novels. Brought up in an academic atmosphere, studying at several American universities and in Europe, acting as secretary of the Horace Mann School in New York and as a member of the State Board of Education of Vermont, Mrs. Fisher has always had her finger on the educational pulse of the country and is thoroughly qualified to speak concerning "a problem compared to which the riddle of the Sphinx looks like a sum in first-grade arithmetic, the problem of getting everybody in a democracy educated." The problem so defined is very fully treated in "Why Stop Learning?" wherein Mrs. Fisher foregoes fiction to write what she calls a running commentary on the educational research reports of the Carnegie Corporation and many others.

It is education, not literacy, with which "Why Stop Learning?" deals, as the author very emphatically makes clear. Complete literacy in the United States is now practically an accomplished fact. A little over one hundred years ago even the idea of making literate every inhabitant of a large country was unheard of. When the idea finally did occur, America not unnaturally expected its accomplishment to usher in a millennium. Yet here we all are today reading and writing and doing a little arithmetic, and not the slightest sign of a millennium upon the horizon. In our struggle after literacy, education has eluded us. "Schools, even the best schools, can only give . . . schooling. Education must be mixed and seasoned with life experience, which is the one element no school can give and no young person can have." And yet "with hardly an exception, the national attempt toward education has concentrated itself upon the minds of our youth."

Comparatively unobserved, at least as far as directional significance is concerned, there have been growing up in America various institutions which make voluntary post-school education possible. These may be scattered and fumbling attempts in the face of a critical situation, but here, Mrs. Fisher feels, we must look for some answer to the

problem of producing an educated citizenry. To the more important of these institutions "Why Stop Learning?" devotes a chapter each, treating them historically as far as the shortness of their life-spans permits and prophesying a little as to what they may develop into. The section on "Correspondence Schools" is packed with vivid facts concerning the piratic practices of the dishonest members of this group. To the casual reader it will come with something of a shock to discover that he himself might in thirty-two states of the Union open a correspondence school without any preparation whatever and be quite within his legal rights in granting whatever degrees he might fancy in the arts and sciences. It is surprising reading. The chapter on "The Free Public Library" lacks this hair-raising element but becomes in Mrs. Fisher's hands a dramatic tale, beginning with "a queer, half-baked product of the revolutionary upheaval in France—a gesticulating, indiscreetly noisy Frenchman named Vattemare," the faher of the free public library; revealing a committee in Boston, disturbed by the gift of fifty volumes from the City of Paris, grudgingly providing "a place for same;" and coming down to a most enthusiastic interpretation of the work and ideals of present-day librarians.

Other chapters deal with Museums, Lyceums, Extension Courses, Parents-as-Students, Workers' Education. A presentation of "Women's Clubs" gives a decidedly foreshortened view of the time extent of women's activity and deals so fully with a particular club, scarcely exceptional, that the more general club work in adult education is somewhat obscured. "What Other People Are Doing," on the other hand, is full of interesting and new material, especially the sketch of the Danish adult school system. Although the book is written for the general reader rather than specialists, it is difficult to understand why Mrs. Fisher has adopted a style (so unlike her natural one) of somewhat slangy journalese in a work pleading for deeper spiritual and cultural values.

A Stock-Taking

THE SCIENTIFIC HABIT OF THOUGHT. By FREDERICK BARRY. New York: Columbia University Press. 1927. \$3.50.

Reviewed by P. B. McDONALD
New York University

HERE is a book that should be read by every teacher of science and research-worker in the country. It is a sympathetic but critical stock-taking of our modern science and scientists written by a man of unusually broad attainments. But the reader should be warned in advance to read the last chapter first. Like many scientific lecturers Doctor Barry (who is assistant professor of the interesting new subject, History of Science, at Columbia University)

lays down his difficult theses first, and warms into an extremely human and pertinent commentator when he has the professional abstractions out of the way. The first two chapters are a little too concentrated and meaty; the last two are a delight.

Says the author in part:

There has come about a subtle change in the tone of cultivated society. The educated man whose interests are restricted to the older humanistic range feels, oddly, not out of place but somewhat detached. He suspects that he no longer shares in its deeper concerns. He is made to feel that he is living on the surface of things; out of touch with great events, the stir of which he feels but cannot grasp, the significance of which he surmises but does not clearly understand. . . . There is an unmistakable tone of earnestness in nearly all discussion. Its tone is serious. The pleasant allusive interchange of thought, the whimsicality, the repartee, is seldom heard. . . . Everywhere and at every hour the cultivated world seems spontaneously and with cheerful earnestness to be going back to school. . . . The scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century have actually remodelled the structure of western civilization. . . . The foundation of all cultural education henceforth must be significant knowledge. . . . Our father's education was certainly too thin.

From these significant excerpts, it must not be inferred that the book is merely a Huxleyian or Wellsian argument for education based on science instead of on the classics. The unique fact about the book is that it breaks new ground. In his laboratory at Columbia, Dr. Barry has been doing pioneer thinking in assessing science and linking it up with metaphysics. How few scientists, for example, trace scientific concepts back to the philosophical implications of the Pythagoreans, the Eleatics, the Atomists, and the Peripatetics. Such liaison tracing is of great importance at this stage of our scientific development, as is scarcely necessary to point out. The natural corollary of reading the book is to wish for its 360 pages to be expanded by additional commentaries and concrete applications into a larger volume. For example, the consequences of our scientists' predilection for empiricism, pragmatism, and skepticism could be revealed in a more intimate and clear-headed way than Professor Dewey has so far seen fit to do. The implication of James and the neo-realists, and of Russell and his changing premises, might be woven illuminatingly into the picture. But, most interesting of all, the chapter on the elements of theory could be indefinitely expanded to include fuller interpretation of the history of science fresh from the author's lectures to the fortunate Columbia students in those classes. Dr. Barry is one of the few men who really know what and how scientists think and have thought; his greatest fault is his fear of criticism from the specialist and pedant for being too discursive—or (that dreaded word in scientific circles) too "popular."



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