

the woods. "Walden," he thought, was full of chaff and brag. "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," which most resembles his own books, has "little real stuff in it." Thoreau was a shirker—"clever," "stimulating," "suggestive." The argument could be turned around with the addition that the suggestion for all that Burroughs did was in Thoreau. This is the level of his criticism, as good perhaps as that of most of the mediocrities, Lowell and Howells excepted, who followed the great creative minds of the mid-nineteenth century, and mellow with a kindly, reflective spirit, self-educating itself slowly for eighty years. As creative literature, ten pages of "chaff" in "Walden" is worth all his twenty-three volumes. But not as a study of Things. With Whitman only, his dear friend, did he rise above critical mediocrity, and then, not so much through insight as by a temperamental likeness, as between natives of the same spiritual atmosphere. This was the heart of an unshaken loyalty, better almost than intellectual comprehension. His book on Whitman—the first book on Whitman—is likely to remain as testimony, the tribute of a disciple with an apostolic will. "He loved Whitman," might also have been inscribed upon his tomb. Peter, to compare great things with small, was also a mediocrity, except in his dogged following of the Christ.

And therefore, in an estimate of Burroughs, whom I read again and again and again in early youth, and therefore do not write of with the quick analysis of a newcomer, I should wipe out as agreeable and wise, but not important, all his philosophy, all his criticism, except of Whitman, and with this many of his twenty-three volumes and a good two-thirds of these Journals which nevertheless have an interest and a value as the context of what remains.

What remains is Things. Burroughs, beyond Thoreau, beyond Audubon, beyond all the nature writers of this period except Hudson, had the faculty of inspiring love for things. As I read over the essays where John Burroughs left his self-education in the affairs of the intellect to recall and describe—"Pepacton," "Winter Sunshine," "The Return of the Birds," "Sharp Eyes," the several qualities of excellence they still possess.

They are good, I believe, because they are products of a lovable mediocrity. I do not mean that Burroughs's observation was mediocre. It was extraordinarily acute and found phrasings so just that he cannot be denied the praise of a minor stylist. He was a far better observer than Thoreau, and yet, like Thoreau, had that faculty of humanizing nature without sentimentalizing it which experimental science, obsessed with detail, has so dangerously lost. His old bark peelings, with the warblers, the cowbird's child shuddering at the impact of cold brook water; his fox in the snow; his discovery for the American imagination of the hermit thrush, the angelic harp of songsters; his whimsical description of the flicker, that woodpecker from the wilderness trying to Americanize himself so as to live with civilized robins and bluebirds and men—are masterpieces in their way. You cannot read them and see the orchards and the birch groves and the birds so bluntly and blindly as before. Your eyes are opened as he so well describes in an essay. Things become animate. Love and curiosity and delight are all inspired.

And yet there is no genius, no greatness in all this. It was something quite different, a difference which may be illustrated by saying that the quotable passages in Thoreau describe moments when the mind suddenly lifts and sees and explains in a medium of words which mean more than their apparent subject matter, whereas with Burroughs his best is a brushwork of description of things which should be part of everyone's experience. It is quite a commonplace mind, more reflective than the ordinary, much more sensitive and loyal, an intellectual's certainly, though even in science curious rather than creative; but a mind endowed with a passion for natural things, like Gilbert White's of Selborne or Audubon's.

This is a great gift and to use it well, it is better not to be troubled with too flaming an imagination. Fireflies are to be hunted near the ground. The eagle Whitman and Emerson with his far-seeing eyes of a hawk, soared too high for Burroughs. It was a happy instinct which led him, when he was poor and struggling in Washington, burying dead

negroes and trying to get into *The Atlantic Monthly*, to drop the Emersonian quest and go back to memory and observation. Thoreau described him when he said that nearly every American boy had been brought up with a gun in his hand and a woods to walk in. That did something to the subconscious which Europe never accomplished. Burroughs, like Thoreau, got beyond the gun, but not beyond the boy in the woods. He learned to write in order to become a second Emerson; but he used his skill best when he caught those cool and happy experiences where free and happy men in a natural environment turn the inward eye upon the minor life which carries the rhythm of their own on back into the inanimate. It is the bliss of solitude of which Wordsworth wrote, remembering his youth.

A mediocre mind is best, as minds go, for recording such experience. It is more justly reflective and steadier than genius. It is not anguished by mystery nor easily turned aside to human complexes. A poet is too tense for sustained description; and indeed if you would get the very feel and look of the American woods you must go to Burroughs and the few descriptive essays of Audubon rather than to Thoreau or even to John Muir whose sentiment wells up too quickly and moistens the scene. Charm is the word for Burroughs, though it is not the charm of other American writers essentially mediocre in comparison with genius, not the witty charm of Oliver Wendell Holmes, nor the graceful charm of Sidney Lanier. Burroughs's charm is in his own rather gentle personality and the complete rendering of what, if we were gentle and observant, we too ought to feel and see.

The earth is ripe for (the plow), fairly lustrous for it, and the freshly turned soil looks good enough to eat. . . . Plucked my first blood-root this morning—a full-blown flower with a young one folded up in a leaf beneath it, only the bud emerging, like a papoose protruding from its mother's blanket. . . .

The soil never looks so inviting as in April; one could almost eat it; it is the staff of life; it lustrous for the seed. Later one wants it covered with verdure and protected from the too fierce sun. Now his rays seem to vivify it; by and by they will bake it. Go and dig up some horseradish now, and bring in some crisp spinach, and the sweet and . . . Let us taste the flavor of the . . . the crisp, the sugary . . . drawn trill of the toad may . . . row of vocal dots on the dusky page of the twilight. It is one of the soothing, quieting sounds, a chain of bubbles, like its chain of eggs; a bell reduced to an even, quiet monotone. . . .

The cast of its song is very much like that of the wood-thrush, and a good observer might easily confuse the two. But hear them together, and the difference is quite marked: the song of the hermit is in a higher key, and is more wild and ethereal. His instrument is a silver horn which he winds in the most solitary places. The song of the wood-thrush is more golden and leisurely. Its tone comes near to that of some rare stringed instrument. One feels that perhaps the wood-thrush has more compass and power, if he would only let himself out, but on the whole he comes a little short of the pure, serene, hymn-like strain of the hermit.

But you cannot quote Burroughs, except for an occasional felicity of phrase. He is at his best in his total effects, like a quiet conversation, not brilliant but memorable. He is at his best as a simple narrator of a walk up the birch and hemlock mountains of the southern Catskills, on over trout streams, past half wild cattle, lost on the ridges, seeking a dark lake where hermits sing and the woodchuck backs hastily against the water maple, surprised at invaders. Not much happens, but behind him the woods have come to life, the flicker's "wick, wick, wick, wick," echoes spring and the orchards, the tumbling trout stream sparkles, a quiet light, half of memory half of new illumination, lies on the pastures and gilds the trees. The vesper sparrow's note of delicate pathos takes on overtones which are of the substance of life itself—some release comes to the imagination cooped and cribbed in brick and concrete and steel and the tighter bars of nervous human concern.

No ordinary man could bring about this release, and if I call Burroughs mediocre I do not mean that he is ordinary. He is essentially "of middle degree," not of that genius which can rouse any man, not of the common clay of which only pots are made. He is, if you please, the common man uncommonly gifted, and so the nearer to all of us, his fellows, if we are indeed of his nature-loving kind, for he has no power to enter the unsympathetic mind. I wish there were more like him, especially of course in the literature of nature, for we Americans in our rebound from the farm life, which was the experience of so many of our grandfathers, need

immensely to be reminded of the soil. We are not natural metropolitans, like the Russian Jews, nor like the English who can get their nature's worth while following the national cult of sport. We professionalize our outdoor sport, making golf as near like work as we can, riding an exercise for parks, and walking an accident. The Englishman is either cockney or nature lover, the American turns Babbitt in a single generation from the farm. And even the Boy Scouts and the nature hikers and the children's camps are being institutionalized into an efficiency which, whatever its values, is not the leisure in nature which Burroughs sought.

I wish there were more like Burroughs in literature, mediocre men not ashamed of their simplicity, not trying to be smart journalists, adroit playwrights, vivid novelists, startling poets, but just setting down with all the skill they can muster, the things they see and like. Great literature does not come that way, but there is much solace in it for the questing spirit. Indeed it is a kind of genius to know yourself and your best perceptions, and to accomplish simply where more unbalanced men strain and fail.

Burroughs has no signs of immortality upon him. He is likely to endure beyond rarer spirits in literature because the homely, happy usefulness of his writing has got him into the text books, and next to great genius, and style, which he had only measurably, a text book is the best preservative of reputation. Many a mediocre Latin and Greek would have been forgotten centuries ago if the schools had not kept him alive. But like so many of these honest ploughers and sowers of the literary soil, who will never grow passion flowers or trees with a phoenix on them, Burroughs will keep readers and will breed new ones. He is like a family medicine, that never quite goes out of use. And I suspect that when his fine old head with its magnificent beard is quite forgotten, and hikers stop going to Slabides, and his many volumes have been reduced to one or two hard come by in private libraries, he will have his revival as Hudson, somewhat prematurely, has already had his, and will be read in "The Return of the Birds" and "Pepacton" with an enthusiasm quite unexplainable except to rambler and lovers of birds and people with inward eyes that find solace in simple experiences of natural beauty and tiny life, and readers with a taste for a style that is like a hill-side pasture, uneven yet composed, with a beauty quite out of proportion to the simplicity of its elements. That is what mediocrity sometimes can accomplish.

## Fads and Hobbies

COLLECTING: AN ESSAY. By BOHUN LYNCH. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928. \$2.

OLD ENGLISH PORCELAIN. A Handbook for Collectors. By W. B. HONEY. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1928. \$6.

Reviewed by JOHN SPARGO

THE average American collector, no matter what his particular hobby may be, is quite likely to let his envy of Mr. Bohun Lynch's opportunities and successes prevent his full enjoyment of the charm of the English collector's distinguished literary style. On the other hand, those who delight in fine prose, but are not interested in collecting anything in the whole gamut of things collectable—if such persons exist nowadays—are all too likely to pass by this essay because of its title. This is to be regretted for the reason that, while Mr. Lynch's essay contains much philosophical reflection and whimsical comment of especial interest to collectors as a class, whether their hobby chances to be postage stamps or first editions, it is eminently worth reading for its fine literary quality. One is led to say that the author's success as a collector is due largely to the discriminating taste reflected in his writing.

It is probably true, as Mr. Lynch says, that "most collectors have been talked into an admiration of the various objects which it is their desire to possess." Otherwise it would be very difficult to suggest a reason for collecting pen nibs, which was the first hobby of Mr. Lynch himself. And not otherwise can the collecting of old glass whiskey flasks, a fad which of late swept over these states like an epidemic, be explained. In the largest collection of these flasks, running into the hundreds, not more than a dozen at the most possess any charm of form or color justifying their preservation. The rest are rubbish: the glass is of poor quality, the designs and forms banal, and the color poor, except in the



negligible number of instances where the union of pure form and color result in beauty worthy of appreciation and preservation. People are talked into the admiration they profess for such rubbish. Equally the good people who a season or so back scoured the backwoods of New England for crude pieces of pine furniture, to take the place of really fine old mahogany in many instances, did so from no real love of pine—which is an insipid and relatively characterless wood, with none of the charm of maple, or cherry, or birch, and needs paint to make it tolerable for long. No, they did it because it was “the thing,” precisely as youngsters collected cigar bands in the nineties.

Mr. Lynch playfully satirizes this sort of collecting in a way that is thoroughly sane and no less thoroughly enjoyable. That, however, is a small part of his essay. In whimsical fashion he tells of many a find—and also many a “sell”—and outlines what he conceives to be the purposes, and the delimitations, of rationalized collecting, the gathering together of things of genuine interest and charm which blend into an ensemble of grace and lasting satisfaction.

Mr. Honey's elaborately illustrated book, “Old English Porcelain,” is a much more pretentious affair. In view of the extensive list of large and relatively expensive books on ceramics published in England within a short time one wonders that there is still a market to tempt authors and publishers; that the saturation point appears not to have been reached. Equally one wonders whether it is possible for any writer at this late day to add anything of importance to our knowledge of such wares as those of the Derby, Chelsea, Bow, and Worcester porcelain factories, to name a few of the best known.

Let it be said at once that a careful and painstaking reading of the book reveals the fact that, as was to be expected, Mr. Honey makes little or no important addition to the already available store of factual information upon the subject of which he writes. The justification of his book rests wholly upon the competent and scholarly manner in which he discusses the many problems involved. Connected with the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, as an official of the department of ceramics, the author has had most unusual opportunities of attaining a degree of perfection of knowledge which no amateur collector can reasonably hope to attain. In addition to the rich collections under his care, Mr. Honey has been able to command, to a most unusual extent, the resources of other great London museums. His qualifications are therefore of the highest. The scholarship manifested throughout the book is sound and adequate, and the literary style, while not brilliant or distinctive, is free both from the heaviness of some writers in this field and the mushiness of others, and makes fairly easy reading.

Mr. Honey succeeds quite admirably in his effort to make technical terms and processes understandable. That this is not an easy thing to do the numerous failures of other writers afford the best evidence. When he discusses the characteristics of pastes and glazes he does not leave the reader puzzled by a mass of technical words which convey little or no meaning. The same understanding of the needs of the amateur collectors and the limitations of the average non-professional reader, is shown in the manner of illustrating the book. It would have been quite easy for one commanding such resources as the author to present illustrations of rare and unusual specimens which would have invested his book with a greater degree of novelty. It would have lessened its value by so much, however, for the value of the illustrations used depends upon their being typical and not exceptional. The average reader who is also a collector of porcelains will do well to read, mark, and inwardly digest in particular the warning Mr. Honey gives against dependence upon makers' marks for attributions. Not only were the marks of famous potters extensively copied by their contemporaries, but it is quite possible to “fake” marks, a very popular opinion to the contrary notwithstanding. The present writer knows of one instance at least in which the mark of an early American pottery, the products of which now command relatively high prices, was cleverly imposed upon quite worthless pieces not so very long ago. It is imperative that the collector must learn to know the wares by their qualities, marks or no marks, if he would obtain a maximum of satisfaction in the pursuit of his hobby. The serious ceramist will make a place for Mr. Honey's book upon his working bookshelf—even if he has to remove some other book to make room.

## Further Reminiscences

THE MEMOIRS OF RAYMOND POINCARÉ (1913-1914). Translated and adapted by SIR GEORGE ARTHUR. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company. 1928. \$5.

Reviewed by BERNADOTTE E. SCHMITT  
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THE second volume of the English edition of M. Poincaré's memoirs includes the third and fourth volumes of “Au Service de la France” and covers the period from January 1913, when he was elected President of the French Republic, to the outbreak of the Great War. As his functions were largely decorative and his political responsibility was nil, his narrative does not compare in interest or importance with the first volume, which explained his conduct as head of the French government during the year 1912. Sir George Arthur has therefore done well to condense the lengthy account of M. Poincaré's ceremonial activities and to present with considerable fulness only that part of the story which deals with July 1914. Unfortunately the



DR. PETRIE'S PROPOSAL

Drawn for Petrie's “Rules of Good Deportment.”  
From “Queer Books,” by Edmund Pearson  
(Doubleday, Doran).

translation does not measure up to the high standard set in the first volume. Not only is there too much of journalese and even slang which is not in keeping with the exquisite diction of the French statesman, but many errors have been committed. Apart from numerous minor mistakes, there are ten passages in which M. Poincaré's language is seriously distorted; indeed in many of them he is made to say the opposite of what he wrote! Four footnote references, which are correctly given in the original, are misplaced. The telegrams between the Kaiser and the Czar have been retranslated from the French when it would have been easy to reproduce the original English of the august correspondents. Students should certainly use the French edition rather than this careless translation.

M. Poincaré's method of dealing with the events of July 1914 is to portray on the one hand the devious and obstinate diplomacy of the Central Powers as set forth in their own diplomatic documents and on the other hand the conciliatory and reasonable attitude of France and her associates. He invites us to compare, almost day by day, the threatening tone and the warlike mood of Berlin and Vienna with the pacific dispositions of St. Petersburg, Paris, and London. In the opinion of the reviewer, the exposition of Austro-German policy is fairly sound, although exception may be taken to some details, and it is easy to understand why M. Poincaré desires this side of the picture not to be forgotten. But he does not, and in the nature of things he cannot, apply the same critical acumen to the documents of the Entente Powers. The result is that he lays himself open to the charge of ignoring what is inconvenient to his thesis, such as certain telegrams of M. Izvolski, the Russian ambassador in Paris, which indicate rather more readiness for war on the part of both the French Government and French public opinion than M. Poincaré would have us believe. He would, in short, have done better to leave the flaying of the Wilhelmstrasse and the Ballplatz to M. Renouvin, whose well-known book is frequently cited, and to confine himself to a straightforward account of French policy during the crisis.

Although he makes considerable use of unpublished documents, M. Poincaré does not entirely lift the veil. Instead of publishing the reports which must have been sent to Paris of the conversations held by the French premier and himself with the Russian statesman at the time of their visit to St. Petersburg on the eve of the crisis, he is content to traverse some of the more extravagant versions. He does not tell us what advice was given to Serbia or whether, as has been alleged, the draft for the Serbian reply to the Austrian ultimatum was prepared by an official of the Quai d'Orsay. Above all, he says very little about the discussions in the French cabinet after his return from Russia although the allegations of his enemies made a full statement desirable. It may be that M. Poincaré's present political duties have interfered with the writing of his book, which lacks something of the clarity of the earlier volumes.

Of course the most important question is that of France's relationship to Russia and the latter's mobilization. The problem was one of extraordinary difficulty for France. As M. Poincaré puts it:

Since the institution of the Franco-Russian alliance, no French Government, of whatever color, had conceived any idea of loosening, let alone renouncing, the bond between us. As a matter of fact, the two great European groups which existed before 1914 had for a considerable time succeeded in keeping the peace in the teeth of constant threats just because they balanced one another nicely and because from the fact that, roughly speaking, they were of equal strength, they had a wholesome fear of coming to blows with one another. No better organization than this could be imagined, and men were quick to say that for the safety of France and the peace of Europe the alliance with Russia and the entente with England were far preferable to any sort of splendid isolation.

And again, in a passage which the translator has omitted:

Two obligations which were difficult to reconcile, but which were equally sacred rested upon us: do the impossible to prevent a conflict and do the impossible to be ready, if in spite of us it did break out. And yet two others which also ran the risk of being somewhat contradictory: not to repudiate an alliance upon which French policy had rested for a quarter of a century and the rupture of which would leave us in isolation, at the mercy of our rivals; at the same time to do what we could to induce our ally to moderation in a matter in which we were much less directly interested than it was.

On July 24, immediately on learning of the Austrian ultimatum, the Russian Government decided, in principle, to mobilize against Austria if the latter proceeded to extremes against Serbia. “Neither to Viviani nor to myself,” says M. Poincaré, “had Sazonoff given any hint of these military preparations, which were certainly not in his mind when we left Russia.” The French ambassador asked for assurances that no military measures had been ordered. Two days later he reported the Russian decision. The French Government did not protest: in face of the Serbian reply, it considered the Russian action justified, and the German foreign minister declared that Germany would not be forced to mobilize if Russia confined her preparations to the southern districts. When, on July 29, the German Government abandoned this position and the Russian Government informed its ally that it must proceed with its military preparations, M. Viviani replied July 30:

France is resolved to fulfil all her obligations as an ally, but in the interests of general peace, and as the Powers less interested are now conferring, I think it would be well that in the precautionary and defense measures which Russia thinks necessary to take, she will do nothing which might afford a pretext to Germany for either a general or partial mobilization of her armed forces.

But what of Izvolski's telegram stating that the minister of war and an official of the foreign office had privately given advice as to how Russia might secretly begin her preparations? M. Poincaré simply denies that the French officials gave such advice and declares that once more Izvolski misunderstood what was said to him. If so, the French Government can be credited with an effort to restrain its ally, whose mobilization it “continued to regret” and to regard as “a too precipitate move.” But since M. Poincaré will not admit that the Russian mobilization justified a German declaration of war or relieved France of her obligations, he and the French Government would have been in an embarrassing position had not Germany also declared war on France, for they were haunted by the terrible fear that if France, as they held she was bound to do, honored her signature and went to the aid of Russia, she might lose the assistance of Great Britain. Thanks to the German action, M. Poincaré is able to represent his country as the victim of deliberate