

From a list of thoughtfully chosen books for the Fall we select these titles of proved interest.

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The New Books

Fiction

(Continued from preceding page)

THE EATER OF DARKNESS. By ROBERT M. COATES. Macaulay. 1929. \$2.50.

Malcolm Cowley spreads himself over the jacket of "The Eater of Darkness" to announce that it is "the first purely Dada novel to be published in English." Dadaism would appear, therefore, to be a wise-cracking, lunatic sophistication, definitely a product of the *transition* school of writing. Irreverently, we suggest that for "Dada" we might just as well insert "blah-blah" or even "flap-doodle." Mr. Coates does not take his novel seriously; so why should we honor him with complete seriousness? He continually jests at himself, giggles when he might to his advantage be straight-faced, and plays the slapstick clown with unpleasant monotony. Typographically, rhetorically, and artistically "The Eater of Darkness" is mad. And madness, unless it be touched by some saving genius, is quite out of place in any novel.

This allegedly "Dada" novel is a burlesque murder story. An insane super-criminal kills by means of an invisible ray; his accomplice is the central character. The thin, jumpy narrative, which tells of the death of this accomplice, is extravagantly difficult to follow, by reason of obscurity and irrelevance. Irritated rather than satisfied, we keep asking, "What of it?" Yet some passages are amusing; others build up an emotional or sensual tension. We refer especially to chapters IX and XI. Undeniably Mr. Coates has wit, quickness of mind, imagination. Perhaps conscientiously fashionable *littérateurs* may fool themselves into believing that they like this sort of thing, and, even, that they understand it. But the most liberal lay-reader will turn the last page (if, indeed, he gets that far) in melancholy and despair. "The Eater of Darkness" seeks for novelty and freedom; it attains, however, merely pretentious and meaningless mannerisms.

SAPLINGS. By IRENE STILES. Henkle. 1929. \$2.50.

The virtues of this novel are quietness and sincerity. Beyond these qualities there is little to interest or stir the reader. We never are in suspense; we never feel ourselves moved by the difficulties in the path of the lovers. No real plot exists, and the characters are dim shadows. Our only praise is for the background, which is London as it exists for this group of young artists. Zedd's, the school where they learn the patter of art; the tea-room so gallantly attempted; the week-ends in Surrey or on the Thames; the endless bustle over trivialities—all this is well suggested. We suspect that this general scene is a remembered one, and that Miss Stiles found her characters, too, in her ingenuous recollections of a life that she herself must once have lived. This suspicion is strengthened by the observed fact that the book lacks focus, selection, and forward movement; it is precisely the sort of thing that a tolerably talented writer might do if someone said, "Oh, my dear, why don't you write up all those interesting experiences you had at Zedd's and at The Kopper Kettle?" "Saplings" gets nowhere, since it has no passion, no convictions behind it. It is rather like a pleasant voice telling a vague little story.

GOLDEN RUBBISH. By WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY. Putnam. 1929. \$2.

To the plain reader, this volume is so dull that it is practically unreadable. Mr. Pelley is seriously putting forward some quite incomprehensible theory of "the Colossal Galvanism behind all mortal life." He also tries to make us understand "the science of vibration." The following is a fair sample of the way his characters hold forth:

What I mean is this: Thinking, by and large, is a receiving of billions upon billions of sublimated light granules from the sun of Universal Intelligence, impacting on brain cells, demanding a housing, seeking conversion into the proper vibratory velocity for practical employment—not unlike the process of an electric current in a common Transformer. Great Thinkers are merely easy receivers; their perceptions are sensitized to tune in on the Absolute.

This sort of highfalutin jargon is all very well for those who think they understand it, but most readers will find it insufferable. Mr. Pelley saddles a tolerable narrative with this incubus of pseudo-mysticism, and as a result the narrative is completely done for before the book is well under way. As a novel, "Golden Rubbish" simply doesn't exist.

ROUX THE BANDIT. By ANDRÉ CHAMSON. Scribner. 1929. \$2.50.

This is one of those serious and rather solemn French novels, laid almost entirely among peasants and in the remote countryside, which generally possess all the faults ascribed by Parisian critics to Anglo-Saxon literature. It is long, and the general tone is heavy, but the ability and sincerity of M. Chamson are not to be gainsaid. His story is, however, a different matter. Though it is claimed that Roux was an actual character,—a young peasant from the Cévennes who in 1914 refused to serve in the army, fled to the hills, and became a semi-legendary figure in local history,—the telling of his tale is often maladroit and unreal to the English reader. The frequent comparison of Chamson with Hardy,—made generally by Frenchmen who have never read a word of the Wessex novels,—is justified by many outward signs, but the inward spark which gives life to the whole sometimes ponderous apparatus of a novel of the soil is generally missing. Chamson's book remains a French parody of Hardy, which is far from admirable in itself.

Such a judgment, almost inevitable to a mind prejudiced beforehand against the comparison, is probably unfair to Chamson, whose "The Road" unquestionably makes a far better impression. He is one of the really considerable younger Frenchmen, and seems as yet immune from the fashionable influences which make many of his contemporaries almost unreadable to anyone not wholly wrapped up in the movement. Mr. Van Wyck Brooks seems to have taken the greatest pains with his version of the book, but it has been impossible to endow it with any particular life.

THE GODFATHER. By Nalbro Barily. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2 net.

BLUE FOREST. By Viola C. White. Four Seas. \$1.50.

THE BOLT. By P. R. Shore. Dutton.

CONSEQUENCES. By Julia Ellsworth Ford. Dutton. \$2.50.

TO HIM THAT ENDURETH. By James A. Herndon. Caldwell, Idaho: Coston.

VOLTAIRE'S CANDIDE. Illustrated by Rockwell Kent. Random House.

CANDIDE. By Voltaire. Edited by Morris Bishop. Scribners. \$1.

ZADIG. By Voltaire. Illustrated by Valenti Angelo. Rimington & Hooper.

THE ADVENTURES OF PEREGRINE PICKLE. By Tobias Smollett. Illustrated by Alexander King. Day. 2 vols.

Juvenile

(The Children's Bookshop will appear next week)

TIMBER LINE. By ALIDA SIMS MALKUS. Harcourt, Brace. 1929. \$2.50.

PIRATES' PORT. By ALIDA SIMS MALKUS. Harpers. 1929. \$2.

CHILDREN OF THE BORDER. By ELLA SHANNON BOWLES. Lippincott. 1929. \$2.

These three stories for young girls follow a pattern that calls for adventure, romance, and vivid description of time and place, but does not provide for character vitality except in broad general outlines. And rarely does one find such interesting, normal, and non-artificial stories made after this pattern. The authors unquestionably know the people and part of the world they describe. They have chosen adventuresome times and people of romantic spirit and so the fact that the stories are true does not render impossible thrills, but, in fact, lends them importance. In spite of the pattern the plot does not dominate the story. The spirit of a people holds interest equally with it.

The first two stories are by the author of "The Dragon Fly of Zuni." In "Timber Line" she has caught the spirit of Rocky Mountain people more accurately than in "Pirates' Port" she has conveyed that of the privateers and smugglers of New York when it was first under English rule.

"Children of the Border," more than the other two books, accepts the lamentable convention of excluding grown-up problems and activities from a young person's book. Young people, with a capacity that grown-ups forget easily, seek to understand those persons they will soon be among. "Children of the Border" gives its readers just enough of the problems of grown-up New Hampshire pioneers and of the feelings of the Indian to make them willing to trade, for more of it, some of the repeated telling of the children's fears.

(Continued on page 462)

"If I could create now one magic word that would make every one want to read the book I would write it down and be utterly satisfied."

—Margery Latimer in the
New York Herald Tribune.

Look Homeward, Angel by Thomas Wolfe

"As interesting and powerful a book as has ever been made out of the drab circumstances of provincial American life. . . . Enormously sensuous, full of the joy and gusto of life, and shrinkingly sensitive, torn with revulsion and disgust . . . a book to be savored slowly and reread."

—Margaret Wallace in the New York Times.



"Mr. Wolfe seems to me the most interesting writer of fiction to appear in America since Glenway Wescott."

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The Wits' Weekly

Conducted by EDWARD DAVISON

Competition No. 73. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best sonnet called "Vanity Fair." (Entries should reach the *Saturday Review* office, 25 West 45th Street, New York City, not later than the morning of December 2.)

Competition No. 74. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best short lyric to be interpolated in Tennyson's "In Memoriam." (Entries should reach the *Saturday Review* office not later than the morning of December 16.)

Attention is called to the Rules printed below.

THE SIXTY-NINTH COMPETITION

The prize for the best short rhymed poem called "The Firstborn" has been awarded to Barbara Williams, who should write, with her address, to claim her prize.

The Winning Entry

THE FIRSTBORN

*THE birds in the garden
Make merry and sing
On sun-gilded branches
All laden with Spring—
Out here sits the darkness,
The moon rises late;
God pity the Firstborn
Laid cold at the gate.*

*From Light out of Darkness,
From Earth out of Flood
God fashioned the garden
And saw it was good.
With His hand full of dust
And the foam of the sea
God fashioned my father
Beneath a green tree.*

*He took of the tree then
Its branch and its bud
And made for my mother
Her sweet maidenhood.
He took of the tree then
Its leaf and its flower
And made for my mother
Her bed and her bower.*

*A wind out of Heaven
Struck flower and fruit;
The tree, it was riven
Its stem and its root.
In the wind-bitten meadow
Unroofed from the sky,
Unsheltered, reluctant,
And weeping came I.*

*The birds in the garden
Make merry and sing
On the blossoming grass
And the sweet boughs of Spring.
Out here sits the darkness;
The gray moon is late;
God pity the Firstborn
Laid cold at the gate.*

BARBARA WILLIAMS.

I was astonished not to receive something better than this week's best. The variety of the entries did not compensate for the absence of more than two or three really printable poems. There were verses about the editorial rejection of manuscripts, about the fading of firstborn dreams (the rainbow-tinted kind, of course), about Ford cars, the birth of twins, Cain's murder of Abel, young fathers behaving traditionally in hospital waiting rooms, and even about a male emu hatching out his ungrateful wife's eggs. Few of these even distantly approached the standard one has learned to demand on this page.

Even the outstanding entries were below par, the authors' par as well as ours. Mary Waterman, an old and respected prize-winner, sent a sentimental little character poem as nauseatingly realistic as any I have ever read and lacking even the tough humor of the old music-hall song that might have been its original.

Arjeh wrote in free verse a kind of monologue spoken by one of Pharaoh's serving maids after the last Plague of Egypt; "Willowby" spoiled a good piece of work by interpolating here and there the quite unnecessary line-refrain "Little son," which was too near to "Sonny Boy" for my liking; Jane Urquhart's concluding lines provided a ruinous anti-climax to an impressive direct description of childbirth, and Howard Donnelly offered four variants of a single poem, all of which were more or less unintelligible. Jean Waterbury must learn to be sparing with abstract nouns and images, and Homer Parsons still needs to distinguish more carefully between

rhetoric and poetry. Most of these competitors have written better for the Wits' Weekly in the past and will do so, I hope, again.

There remained Claudius Jones, Paul Sandoz (who, in a single poem, used indifferently both third and second person pronouns, and thus spoiled some good lines), Eleanor Glenn Wallis, Clifford Gessler, G. F. R. Walker, and the prize-winner, whose medieval-sounding middle stanzas have a definite charm and a lyric tone that I miss in the rival entries and also at the beginning of her own poem. She took the prize by a hair's breadth from those whose verses are printed below. Claudius Jones offered two entries, one a sonnet which I hope to print later, the other a monologue which was a little too long to qualify as a short poem.

*When the hot agony was past, and
the drugged sleep,
I awoke refreshed and the nurse
brought you in;
I had not felt impatience, only deep
Relief that all was over and a faint
Amused excitement and expectancy;
I never had liked babies—it was
quaint
That I should be a mother. Could I
guess
Until I saw small, mottled you
emerge
From woolly wrappings that my ten-
derness
Would rush to meet the son that I
had bought
With such a price of pain? And
could I know
What hungry searching lips so
quickly taught?
ELEANOR GLENN WALLIS.*

*Between the fronds of flame-hung
trees
That glow like lanterns through the
town,
Across the fragrant mountain breeze
The mellow sunlight trickles down
And spreads bright pools along the
grass
And gilds the roadway where I go
Remembering lovely things that pass,
And one whose laugh was sweet to
know—*

*And try to think, with that same
smile
His face is lifted to the sun
In that far-hidden mystic isle
Where Kane's living waters run.
CLIFFORD GESSLER.*

*For seven hours has he endured the
strain,
Trying all this time to make the
nurses
Think that he was calm and uncon-
cerned
With parenthood and these grim
sounds of pain.*

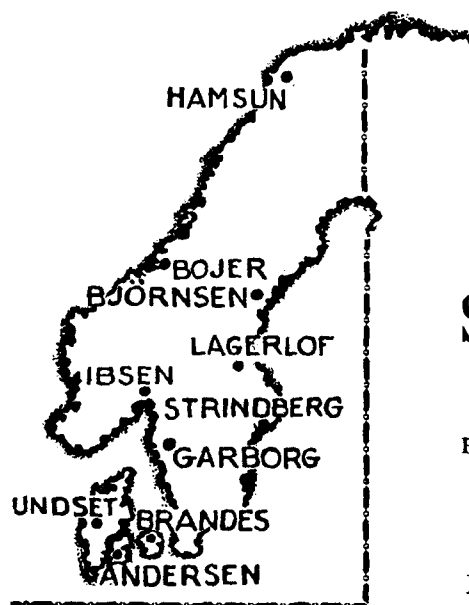
*There was no screaming, but sounds
that women make,
That men must blench to hear, such
sounds as tear
A futile curse on God from hearts
made mad
With chains of helplessness they can-
not break.*

*Then stillness, the pressure of the
sounds released,
And now he dares to think: I am a
father.
He is surprised to find this matters
less
Than that the fearful sounds of birth
have ceased.*

G. R. WALKER.

RULES

Envelopes should be addressed to Edward Davison, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City. All MSS. must be legible—typewritten if possible—and should bear the name or pseudonym of the author. Competitors may offer more than one entry. MSS. cannot be returned.



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Translated by Isaac Anderson

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