

fascination by imitating, in most of his narratives, the methods and materials of campfire yarns. The art of this genre is more difficult than one might suspect, since somehow, for all its apparent simplicity, the form magnifies even minor faults. Phrasings inappropriate for vernacular speech, touches of condescension, or an inability to order narrative details tellingly give an author away as an artificial imitator. Such slips mar most of Mr. Smith's stories. One, however, "Last Trip Together," is a splendid exception—a boy's account, simple, dextrous, and moving, of the journey with the body of his father from a hunting lodge to the distant town downstream. If other stories had reached an equally high level, the volume would have been an important accomplishment.

Children's Books in America

PETER PARLEY TO PENROD. A Bibliographical Description of the Best-Loved American Juvenile Books. By Jacob Blanck. 500 copies. New York: R. R. Bowker Co. 1938. \$4.50.

Reviewed by JOHN T. WINTERICH

CHILDREN'S books, bibliographically speaking, are far from being child's play. The first edition of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" is as involved a production as a First Folio Shakespeare, and the earliest Rollo book is rather more elusive than the 1594 "Titus Andronicus." Technically, therefore, from a collector's point of view the juvenile has everything. And sentimentally as well. Not every owner of a first edition of Florio's Montaigne has ventured beyond the noble title-page, but every owner of a first "Toby Tyler" or "Captain January" has certainly read it entire in one edition or another.

"Peter Parley to Penrod" is much more, however, than a collector's manual. It presents an excellent conspectus of the juvenile book in America from the days of its first great nineteenth-century exponent, Samuel G. Goodrich, otherwise Peter Parley himself. It is significant to note how many important juveniles were originally serialized. And it is even more significant to note that the great majority of them were written (or at least issued) after their authors had passed their fortieth years.

The exceptions are few. Edward S. Ellis, the prodigy of the dime novel, became a Beadle author at twenty; Harry Castlemon (Charles Austin Fosdick) launched the Gun-Boat series at twenty-five; Jack London sounded "The Call of the Wild" at twenty-seven. But Charles Carleton Coffin published "The Boys of '76" at fifty-four, Elijah Kellogg the first of the Elm Island stories at fifty-six, and Lucretia Peabody Hale "The Peterkin Papers" at sixty—plus a sequel six years later. To cite the authors between forty and fifty would be virtually to list all the other names on Mr. Blanck's roster. Apparently one must become a parent or a grandparent, or at least an aunt or an uncle, to appreciate the child's book as an art form.

Dear, Dear Boy

CECIL BEATON'S NEW YORK. By Cecil Beaton. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1938. \$4.

Reviewed by BENNETT A. CERF

A STAFF of two hundred men, working under the auspices of the Federal Writers' Project, recently completed, after a full year's research and editing, a book on the City of New York. Now Mr. Cecil Beaton, a young London man about town, who has lived in New York for only the shortest of intervals, and then mingled almost exclusively with a set as representative of the city as a band of Zulu cannibals, has provided us with another one. Mr. Beaton's particular set in Mayfair and on Park Avenue may take this volume to their hearts, but to the people who really know and love New York, his superficial, patronizing, and inaccurate generalities will have all the tang and appeal of a stale cream puff.

Mr. Beaton realized, of course, that he would have to widen his horizon for a book of this sort. If his New York was bounded heretofore by Mrs. Harrison Williams on the North and El Morocco on the South, he was ready now, by God, to explore the seamy side of town for the sake of art. Off, then, to Bellevue and wrestling matches, to the Museums and Harlem! Mr. Beaton saw all. His descriptions are as penetrating and revealing as those in a dozen guide books on sale for a quarter and less the country over. Like a true democrat, he mingled always with hoi polloi. His taxi, he tells us, he hired for twenty cents the first mile and five cents for each subsequent mile, and seemingly unaware of the exceptional bargain he had contrived, he fared forth, the while he engaged the driver in illuminating converse, and thereby studied the very best brand of American slang. To us, Mr. Beaton now reports, money has become "rope," "shut your mouth" has been transformed into "button up yer kisser," and "at particularly rowdy parties rah-rah boys shout at intervals the approving slogan, "razzle dazzle." My, my!

No book about New York would be complete without a few thumb-nail sketches of some of the dynamic and significant figures who are truly representative of the metropolis, and Mr. Beaton obliges with graceful bouquets for Doctor Kommer, Mrs. Vincent Astor, Mrs. Corrigan, Miss Elsa Maxwell, Mr. Raimund Von Hofmannsthal, Mrs. Harrison

Williams, and a number of other moulders of that ever-changing melting pot of ours.

Last year Cecil Beaton drew a sketch for a magazine that was particularly childish and offensive; it necessitated a reprinting of thousands of copies and landed Mr. Beaton out on his ear. In his book on New York, Mr. Beaton has evidently gone to terrific pains to offend nobody. Maybe Cecil Beaton should stick to his photography for a while. There is a job that he knows and does exceptionally well. Otherwise, this book will be an unutterable bore for everybody in America except the group that already thinks he is a dear, dear boy.

Anatole France's Satiric Fantasy

PENGUIN ISLAND. By Anatole France. New York: Heritage Club. 1938.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THE Heritage Club has reissued "Penguin Island," Anatole France's satiric fantasy about a nation of penguins who were baptized by the mistake of a short-sighted saint, and who, when the Lord had miraculously changed them into human beings (as He of course was bound to do, for otherwise His sacrament would have been void) provide a burlesque of the development of the human race and the history of France. After the idolatry he enjoyed in his later years, Anatole France's reputation of course declined sharply, and it will be long before we regain the stable society in which a mood of gentle skepticism seems the finest of attitudes. Nevertheless, the sly irony of "Penguin Island" still stands up remarkably well, especially in the earlier portions of the book, where the author deals with fundamental human traits, such as the relation of modesty and sex appeal; the latter half, with its elaborate parodies of the French governmental scandals of the turn of the century, requires a more detailed knowledge of all the actors involved than most Americans are likely to possess.

It will be seen that your reviewer has taken the trouble to reread "Penguin Island." If the same can be said for M. Sylvain Sauvage, who has illustrated this edition with ten water-colors, then he is a very self-willed man; for although his pictures are in themselves graceful and witty, he has disregarded the plainest indications in the book. Whereas France speaks of the short necks and thighs which betrayed the penguin origin of his people, M. Sylvain's caricatures are all some eight or nine heads tall; when France relates that in the stone age the first woman to cover her body thus attained the love of a herdsman, M. Sylvain shows us a Louis XV nymph and swain, keeping sheep à la Watteau. The illustrations, however, are pleasant in themselves; the binding, on the contrary, is a repellent imitation leather, which is described by the publishers in their accompanying slip as a fabric produced by the du Pont de Nemours Company. That is one way to describe it, but it still smells like fabrikoid.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 248)

ELIZABETH GASKELL—
"CRANFORD"

She acknowledged that she always confused *carnivorous* and *graminivorous* together, just as she did *horizontal* and *perpendicular*; but . . . in her day the only use people made of four-syllabled words was to teach how they should be spelt.

The New Books

Biography

PROFILES FROM THE NEW YORKER.

With a Preface by Clifton Fadiman.
Knopf. 1938. \$3.

Twenty-three of the best profiles from *The New Yorker* are collected here, including Wolcott Gibbs's masterpiece on Henry ("backward ran sentences until reeled the mind") Luce, Jack Alexander's job on Vincent Astor, Alva Johnston's on Bishop Manning, ditto on Nicholas Murray Butler, Janet Flanner's on Queen Mary. A profile, says Mr. Fadiman incontrovertibly, is "not a short biography. It's not a personality sketch. It's not an exercise in the apt arrangement of anecdote. It's not a chronicle scandaleuse. It's not an evaluation of character. It's all of these and none. It is—a Profile." In any event, it is one of the most deservedly popular departments in *The New Yorker*, and all the examples of the form included in this book are worth reading, many of them more than once.

G. S.

THE STORY OF THE WINGED-S. By
Igor I. Sikorsky. Dodd, Mead. 1938. \$3.

*It's a wonderful bus, the Sikorsky;
Of humans it takes up a scoresky,
There is much motorovitch,
The mechanics for which
Sleep in bungalows built on the floorsky.*

The limerick dates from 1915, when the big Russian airplanes were the only ones in the world that would take up a scoresky. Most people in aviation regarded the tall tales about their size, power, usefulness for transport and for war as Slavic hyperbole, and the planes themselves as something interesting but unimportant like the tiglon at the zoo. This book, a singularly unvarnished and unemotional narration, is the tale of how Igor Sikorsky turned the joke on the world. Whether the last of the aviation pioneers is describing how he lived on brown bread and beans in a six-dollar-a-week New York rooming house, or the moment of dizzying triumph when the S-38 taxied to her landing stage and he realized he had the best and fastest heavy airplane in the world, it is all plain, simple statement, from which the reader must work up his own blood pressure.

Still it is a statement one would not willingly miss, especially toward the end of the volume, where Mr. Sikorsky breaks down into the confession that at the crucial moment in airplane design, having made all calculations to the fifth decimal point, the engineer looks at the result and changes the most important parts because his intuition tells him they do not feel right.

F. P.

MADAME DE STAËL. PORTRAIT OF A
LIBERAL IN THE REVOLUTIONARY
AGE. By Margaret Goldsmith. Longmans, Green. 1938. \$3.50.

Learning did not sit lightly on Germaine de Staël. She took herself with grim seriousness and she expected her contemporaries to regard her with like

solemnity. Her heavy intellectualism, her persistent and not always polite curiosity, her witheringly dogmatic assurance, all contributed to the making of France's most inescapable bluestocking. Heiress to Necker's millions, she gained further renown from her wealth, while her long, weightily argumentative books appeared with sufficient frequency to keep her pretensions fresh. Nobody could ignore her, not even Napoleon, whose affected scorn concealed a not imprudent fear. She lived through violent and continuous change, social and political. For some of it she was responsible, at least left-handedly. Active or passive, however, she never ceased to deliver her opinions as if they were ultimatums to an ignorant and insignificant world. And the world listened; it might laugh a little in secret, but in public it exhibited a healthy respect.

Miss Goldsmith shares with Madame de Staël's contemporaries a rather uncritical admiration for the lady's prowess. She celebrates the high-priestess of an enlightened liberalism, the free-thinker who would suffer no restraints, the philosopher whose wisdom permitted no disagreement. She praises so zealously and so indiscriminately that she can give only a glance at inconsistencies in her subject's mental and physical life. Even the love affairs with such dissimilar men as Talleyrand and Constant are dismissed with almost no comment. Madame de Staël was undeniably a great and powerful woman. She was also ridiculous. This biography would be a better book if it were not blind to her absurdities.

C. D. A.

Fiction

SECOND MEETING. By Lucian Cary.
Doubleday, Doran. 1938. \$2.

There is no great divergence between Mr. Cary's novels. They are all amiable, straightforward, and entertaining. They are romantic idylls, which do not lead to extensive speculation. They do not leave any problems unresolved. If the heroine has failed to recognize the virtue of a good man and arranges an unfortunate marriage with a bad man, there is a reasonable expectation that Mr. Cary will fix things up by bringing back the original man. This is the essential problem in "Second Meeting." You'll be able to run through this novel very quickly and quite happily, but after you're out of breath you may find yourself in the position of the Red Queen, in the same place you started from.

R. S.

THE WAYFARER. By Shirley Seifert.
Mill. 1938. \$2.50.

This book is another morsel served up to satisfy our current hunger for picaresque novels which use the panorama of history as background. The story opens in Cayuga County, N. Y., during the 40s, when John Otis Cotter was a horse-loving lad with dreams of the West; and it closes in 1916 with aging John now the owner of a Missouri plantation and a string of race horses. In between are

sandwiched adventures on a New Bedford whaler, a journey to gold-greedy California, years spent as an outrider along the Santa Fe Trail, John's marriage to a frontier merchant's daughter, his part in the siege of Vicksburg, the purchase and development of Grass Patch, the growth of Cotter children.

While the author deals with adventure, the story is quick-moving and filled with suspense. But in emotional crises the characters become woefully melodramatic. The history, though factually correct, is merely a backdrop before which they wander to meet with casual fortuity along the rim of civilization. John's cousin Miriam is the one well-rounded creation, and the story lags after her departure. With such material as the era of westward expansion at her command, Miss Seifert should have produced a better book. At least she might have stuck more closely to the exciting adventures of John's early life. For it is when he settles down with Molly that the story sinks into the doldrums.

R. W.

MR. CINDERELLA. By Rex Stout. Farrar & Rinehart. 1938. \$2.

Very amusing story. It's about a young man who happened upon a discovery of a new cosmetic base, and who got rich on it, much against his better judgment. Mr. Stout, whose Nero Wolfe is one of the great characters of detective fiction, might have made a real satire on American business out of this story, but he preferred to keep it on the level of farcical extravaganza. This is perfectly all right with us, because the story is top-notch of its kind; it has the pace and action of the Nero Wolfe stories, and all we miss is the hard-boiled vernacular of the Wolfe stooge, Archie Goodwin. You can't ask for better summer reading at this time of the year than "Mr. Cinderella."

G. S.

Miscellaneous

WILD LONE. The Life of a Pythley Fox.
By "BB." Scribners. 1938. \$3.

"One more book about a fox, by a fox-hunter," we said to ourself, and prepared to resist fox, fox-hunter, and book. Our resistance is broken down; we have capitulated, and all three have marched in upon us.

True, the materials are not really fresh. Every fox-hunting Englishman with any literary aspirations sooner or later writes this book. We mean, a book of this type. And here once again we have the pink-cheeked girl of the old manor, the hard-riding master of hounds, the old story of hounds lured to death on thin ice, the bluff old yeoman who ignobly shoots foxes instead of letting the dogs tear them to pieces as sportsmanship requires, and the brutal poacher, a criminal of the deepest die.

And yet, page by page, our resistance weakened. Finally we were an addict. Not of fox-hunting. We still think Oscar Wilde was right when he called it "the pursuit of the uneatable by the unspeakable." No, we succumbed to the author's feeling for nature. There is dew on every leaf of this book. Or, if the mood is not that of