

against an unjust imperial governor was fanned by general discontent and by rival factions to the proportions of a major insurrection, which led to the looting of the city, the firing of the ancient church of Saint Sophia, and the coronation of a rival emperor, a revolt which might have become a successful revolution if it had not been for the determination of Theodora, the military genius of Belisarius, and the good luck of the arrival of some provincial troops at the right moment. Yet the story remains a minor one; it is an event which might have changed the course of history, but didn't, told as it may have happened, or may not. And there is a lack of human interest which is ill replaced by a few flashes

of contemporary satire, neither entirely convincing as ancient history nor clearly worked out as modern analogies, as when, in spite of his disclaimer, Mr. Masfield borrows some phrases from a recent cabinet minister for a speech in the imperial senate. It seems to be the fate of those who write fiction of the Eastern Empire that their portraits are as flat and conventionalized as Byzantine icons; neither Justinian nor Theodora nor the old court official who tells the story, nor any one except, for a moment, the unlucky cat's-paw crowned as opposition emperor, ever becomes more than a picture without perspective, painted with boldness of line and brilliance of color, but in the flat, nevertheless.

## Franken...

*THE BOOK OF CLAUDIA.* By Rose Franken. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1941. 307 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CURRIE CABOT

MANY novels are written about a woman's life, about love, and marriage and motherhood, and "Claudia" is one more—but with what a difference! "Claudia" has everything that the other novels have of truth and reality, and an infinite wealth of humor and warm life besides. Rose Franken's gift for comedy, and her delicious understanding, turn ordinary details and banal situations into things to be relished and enjoyed. "The Book of Claudia" is the very book that Claudia longed for in vain—"a plain story about ordinary people like herself, with as little description as possible, and a lot of everyday conversation."

The chapters of "The Book of Claudia" are like radio sketches, each one a small and complete entity. Like scenes heard on a radio, they give you a sense of eavesdropping, with something more—a feeling of looking in through lighted windows at people living their lives. Claudia and David, a modern young couple, are exactly right in time and place, down to the last detail of their conversations. They are incredibly real; their cat is real; their dogs and cows and pigs, their servants and their house have the enchanting completeness and imaginative existence of toys or of the theatre.

One can only be grateful for "The Book of Claudia." There is a little too much of it, and before the book is finished, enough is definitely enough; but for certainly more than half the way, one feels delight and enthusiasm.

## O'Hara...

*MY FRIEND FLICKA.* By Mary O'Hara. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1941. 349 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROSEMARY CARR BENÉT

HORSE lovers will like this tale very much. What is more remarkable in a book so full of equines and their ways, the reader-not-interested-in-horses (there should be a portmanteau word to express that) will like it too. There is a human and appealing story here of a boy and his colt, and also an excellent, vigorous description of a Western family and of ranch life in Wyoming. It is a popular combination. A pet story primarily, it has the excitement and flavor of a good Western.

Because it is about a sensitive little boy and his much-loved pet, the book will be compared, inevitably, to "The Yearling." The background in both books is so completely different, however, that there the comparison ends. Mary O'Hara delights in Wyoming, the lay of the land, the blowing wind, the color, the light; and she puts all these things in her book. "The wide loneliness. . . Grass and animals and sky. You can smell the loneliness. No—it's the emptiness you can smell." She also knows a great deal about horse raising from the practical side, and that, too, is in the book. Birth, death, the age-old factors of heredity and environment provide problems that must be faced in the stable much as they are faced under man's roof. Fortunately she does not sentimentalize the horse too much. She respects his intelligence, and through the words of Rob McLaughlin, the boy's father, she manages to pass on a good deal of sound information about horse nature and horse ways.

It is an amusing fact, however, that next to Flicka and her immediate



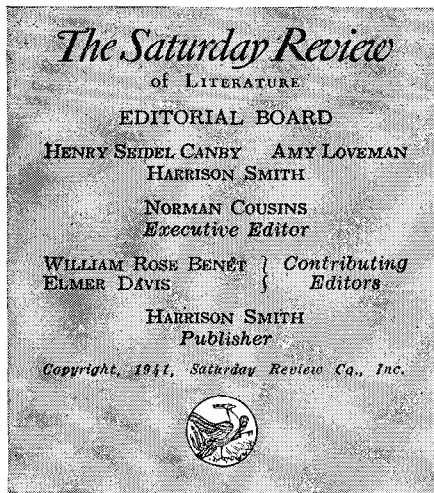
Mary O'Hara

family, the creature who is most alive in the book is a feline, the McLaughlin's house cat, Pauly.

Unlike many horse-lovers, Mary O'Hara also likes, respects, and is interested in people. All the members of the McLaughlin family are alive,—the capable, practical, sometimes short-tempered father, the agreeable, intuitive mother, the well-adjusted elder son, Howard, and the problem child, Ken.

Ken troubled his parents because he was an absent-minded dreamer who would set about a task and then forget about it. All he wanted in life was a colt of his own. When he got one,—a temperamental, high-strung filly, his adored Flicka, his whole life changed. He had a problem child of his own to look after. As his father said "You'll train her, and she'll train you. I want you to make a good pony out of her. I want her to make a man out of you." That, in effect, is what happened. Ken assumed responsibility and faced life. Running through the book, is a solid, earthy wisdom.

At the end, the author pulls out every emotional stop, for not only is the colt snatched from the jaws of death, but the boy almost dies too. Because her story is exciting enough, she manages to make this piling up of emotion credible. The end is dramatic and would make an excellent moving picture. If there is a talented filly in Hollywood, with a golden-chestnut coat, eyes set far apart, "a bit dish-faced like an Arab," and a beautiful cream-colored mane and tail, and she is looking for a part, why here is an excellent story for her. This is a lively tale in which both horses and men have a great zest for life.



## A POET IN GOVERNMENT

THE appointment of Mr. Archibald MacLeish to the directorship of the Office of Facts and Figures just set up by the President marks a new step in the education of the American people in national affairs, and, by indirection, in world politics. It should make for a more accurate knowledge and intelligent debate of current problems than has ever been possible before. For now at last there will be a bureau of reference to which disparate statements emanating from the departments and agencies of Government concerned with the defense effort can be sent in order to have the wheat separated from the chaff and through which confusion can be resolved from conjecture into fact.

Probably at no time in our history has there been so general an awareness of the portentous decisions that await to be made as today, or so wide a forum of public discussion as now prevails. But curiously, despite the constant debate that wages in the press and on the air, there has seldom been so little certainty as to what the actual course of Government may be, or as to the precise steps which have been taken or are in contemplation by the numerous agencies which have been instituted to put the United States on a defense basis. And strangely, it is not because we are given too little but that we are bombarded with too much news that confusion reigns in the public mind. What indeed is the poor man to believe who on the inside page of his paper finds a Senate Committee at complete variance with the Cabinet official whose statement he has read on the first page, or who finds tucked away in the financial news, data entirely contradicting the facts of a featured news story? He may or may not know that Government departments have almost all of them their press divisions which distribute "handouts" presenting the news from

their point of view and which may stress factors quite at variance with those of other agencies. He may not know that the Washington correspondents use these handouts for their own reports, in part, if they are enterprising and can manage to ferret out news for themselves, or in whole if they are less energetic or able. But whether he knows it or not an enormous mass of information, of theory, of wishful thinking is constantly being loosed upon him, and he has hitherto had no referent to enable him to arrive at a judgment based on precise and concrete data. It is to make this possible that Mr. MacLeish's office has been established, and he will act as sifter and coördinator of information coming in from all the agencies of Government. By creating this directorship

the President intends not to eliminate any of the existing news agencies, but to build "an interdepartmental clearing house" which, by checking the information of one against that of the others, will be able correctly to assess facts and assemble data.

Fortunately for the country, Mr. MacLeish, who has won the admiration even of those who greeted with hostility his appointment to the most coveted library post in the nation, will retain his position as head of the Library of Congress. Poetry, for the time being, will probably lose him. But since he combines in rare degree those qualities which the hour demands, literature must perforce bide its time until those happier days when, the sword once more in its scabbard, he can return to the pen.

A. L.

## The Vision in the Meadow

By Josiah Titzell

*What was a staring, bell-hung cow  
is but a white-boned memory now.*

BEYOND the sill the green world stirs  
and opens arms of afternoon;  
in every field an insect whirs  
and autumn will come soon.

Yet ever will the mind's-eye see  
this leaf-turned day, this fire of sun,  
as turning backwards it can see  
that day when Spring has just begun

and eager summer spreads her skirts,  
or further back when winter thaws,  
back when the junko, snow-bound, flirts  
among the lilac's empty claws.

For in the skull of tree and root  
the junko sees the shining eye  
that mirrors time, he hears the flute  
of hearts that dreaming never die.

He knows the moment, rich and rare,  
is sister to some yesterday  
that still is beating in the air;  
time turns, friend cow, but not away.

Oh junko, skipping in the past,  
like you we see and, christened, know  
this moment is not first or last,  
that in the Spring your earth of snow

is spilled into the thirsty brook  
and drawn again into the sky,  
is read again from cycle's book  
to fill again the loving eye

of junko and the under-stone,  
of boy and girl and house and leaf,  
of empty skull and marrowed bone;  
the only thing that dies is grief.

*The past shall be the future now,  
as these white bones are still the cow.*