

very fine previous novel. Her ability to transfer to us some of the wonder and awe of Mrs. Danforth's early Christmases, the faculty for sweeping us into the opulent, meaningful scenes of her childhood, the communication of the very experience of childhood—these are remarkable in the excitingly promising beginning of her book. But it seems to me that as her attempts to explore motivation, and the motives themselves, become more complex, the characters become less convincing and, oddly enough, less interesting. For her Freudian probing destroys the subtlety of her characterization and, rather than simply illuminate the final violence, leads us to wonder whether we are not being confronted with too much undisguised doctrine right out of the psychological book. Mrs. Danforth as she muses before a remembered Christmas tree is charming; Mrs. Danforth as she represents the overprotective mother suffering from the traumata of a love-starved, sheltered childhood is slightly less convincing.

The sense of construction, the ability to choose precisely the right word, the delicate vibratory reaction to nervous, over-refined intellectual life, to our vaguely discontented, ever-groping pattern of living—these are surely there. Miss Bolton is undoubtedly head and shoulders over most of the people writing today. But I believe we have yet to see a book which utilizes fully her vast ability.

Story Behind the Story

ALL SORTS AND KINDS. By Christopher La Farge. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1949. 301 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HOLLIS ALPERT

IT'S virtually a custom now for an author, when he gathers together his stories for a collection, to write a preface explaining his literary method and to append notes, either fore or aft of each story, which detail the circumstances of its composition, how many rejections it had before its worth was finally appreciated by some discerning editor, and similar facts. This Christopher La Farge has done for "All Sorts and Kinds." But he has gone farther than most. He has taken the reader into his confidence and has appointed him, should he wish to accept the honor, to the position of reader-critic. For the reader-critic Mr. La Farge has divulged the intention he had with each story. And then, very candidly, he asks reader-critic to decide for himself whether either success or failure has resulted from the intention.

The exercise is uncommonly interesting in this case, for Mr. La Farge is a skilled and original story-teller. For the reader who doesn't wish to be a critic too, there is no danger of missing the point of a story. It is stated for



Christopher La Farge—"We do not have time or patience for the mature."

him. For reader-critics (and who is there who is not one in some embryonic or developed form?) there is the opportunity to test his own evaluations of a piece of work against the author's. And, in addition, here is a really valuable sort of case-book of the short story for those who practise the form, whether they be apprentices or professionals.

There is, for instance, the frank admission that Mr. La Farge began his story writing under the strong influence of Ernest Hemingway. It's an influence that can indeed be clearly seen in a story like "Scorn and Comfort," in which a man succeeds in freeing himself from his restricting past. The influence certainly doesn't harm the story, for there is not imitation but a conscious utilizing of an attractive method. In the case of "Der Kukuk" Mr. La Forge notes that magazine editors in one and all rejecting the story, commented upon the striking similarity to the work of Kay Boyle, although he hadn't, up to that time, read her work. However the editors' judgment in not printing the story might better have been respected, for this little mood vignette about the effect of an old-world song upon some refugee instructors at an American ski resort is so slight as to leave the reader all but unmoved. The intention, clear though it was, here is not enough.

But the author comes closer to his own in the delightfully humorous stories "The Special Class" and "Two White Horses." And he manages to be deeply affecting with "Mary Mulcahy," which deals with a day in the life of an

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

THIS, THAT, AND THE OTHER

Fannie Gross, of Asheville, N. C., submits twenty famous "triplets" from the works of twenty well-known authors and asks you to match each series with the list of writers at the left. Allowing five points for each correct link-up, a score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers on page 36.

1. Brightness, purity, and truth
2. Buxom, blithe, and debonair
3. Clear, sparkling, and divine
4. Fallen, cold and dead
5. Friendship, love, and liberty
6. Guide, philosopher, and friend
7. Healthy, wealthy, and wise
8. Infirm, weak, and despised
9. Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking
10. Masters, lords, and rulers
11. Meadow, grove, and stream
12. Moral, sensible, and well-bred
13. Mournfully, gently and humanly
14. Pride, cruelty, and ambition
15. Quiver, bow, and arrows
16. Ripen, fall, and cease
17. Rumble, grumble, and roar
18. Sobs, sniffles, and smiles
19. Unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown
20. Unwept, unhonored, and unsung

- () Byron
- () Coleridge
- () Cowper
- () Dryden
- () Franklin
- () O. Henry
- () Herford
- () Hood
- () Lyly
- () Markham
- () Milton
- () Otway
- () Pope
- () Raleigh
- () Read
- () Scott
- () Shakespeare
- () Tennyson
- () Whittier
- () Wordsworth

Irish-American maid, although he fails to mention the similarity of this story to Katherine Mansfield's "The Life of Ma Parker." In "The General's Room" he achieves a remarkable portrait of a woman living to and for herself, a type which frequents a good many of the tales.

In the more recent stories (the collection is made up of pieces written over a ten-year period) Mr. La Farge goes far afield from his earlier or Hemingway-type period. With "Retreat from Victory" he acknowledges entering into a new phase, one in which he becomes more concerned with the "subtleties of mood and emotion" and less concerned with the "necessary exigencies of plot."

But these, for me, are the least successful of his stories. The concentration is almost entirely placed on aspects of character, something praiseworthy in itself, but it is as though in the process his created people have become abstracted from reality, their conflicts somehow represented more mathematically than with truly alive mood and emotion. I found most of the ones in this group of stories, with the exception of the cleverly done "The Three Aspects," quite pale and almost monotonous in their telling, although they never fail to make their sharply wise and valid points. They are about mature people and mature conflicts, and in his notes Mr. La Farge makes the complaint that we as a

(Continued on page 46)



—From "Goethe's World."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—"no purer genius."

Belles-Lettres. The half dozen important new books on writers and writing reviewed here afford glimpses into the literary life of five different nations. This summer Germany—and USA—will celebrate the bicentennial of the birthday of Goethe; for the occasion Berthold Biermann has edited a volume of writing by and about the Sage of Weimar, "Goethe's World." From England comes a brilliant collection of essays, "Poets and Story-Tellers," in which Lord David Cecil undertakes to enlighten the ordinary reader about various British literary masterpieces. France is represented by the third and last volume of André Gide's "Journals." The first stirrings of literary art in Russia are recounted in N. K. Gudzy's "History of Early Russian Literature." And one of our own literary giants, Henry Thoreau of Concord, Massachusetts, is considered in his relation to nature in Reginald L. Cook's "Passage to Walden."

The Sage of Weimar

GOETHE'S WORLD. Edited by Berthold Biermann. New York: New Directions. 1949. 422 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by CLAUDE HILL

THERE have been great men, fabulous characters, striking personalities, and remarkable talents in this world, but no purer genius has appeared in the last two centuries than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose two hundredth birthday all civilized nations will celebrate this summer. Curiously, of all countries of the Western world, America has been least affected by the spirit of the unique German, and his works have never here enjoyed the reverence customarily reserved for a Shakespeare, Dickens, Molière, Balzac, or Tolstoy. With the greatest men of our age long having confessed their debt to Goethe, from André Gide to Albert Schweitzer and Thomas Mann, it seems that this year's anniversary will afford Americans an excellent opportunity for re-evaluation and belated recognition. Preparations are being made for dignified celebrations all over the country, new editions and translations will come out during the next months, an international seminary is going to be held in the Colorado mountains, and many people, to whom Goethe has just been a word, will gain a glimpse of his world.

"Goethe's World" is, therefore, a welcome and, in more than one respect, necessary homage to the pending anniversary. Admirably edited by Berthold Biermann, well illustrated, and ably translated, the handsome volume introduces the layman to the complex and awe-inspiring personality of one of the greatest human beings who ever lived. Without pretending to open "the whole world" of Goethe, Mr. Biermann, who has also

contributed a sober and modest introduction, has surprisingly well succeeded in recreating the manifold impressions which the Sage of Weimar made on his contemporaries. Out of Goethe's own diaries, reminiscences, letters, and testimonies of friends and visitors, with interspersed notes by the editor, the story of one of the most incredibly versatile and interesting men unfolds before the reader's eyes. Starting with the mother's recollections of the infant in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, the book quickly passes over the student's youthful flirtations at Leipzig and the young poet's stormy apprenticeship at Strasbourg in order to dwell at length on the long and little-interrupted span of the Weimar years. It was here, in this tiny German "Athens" that Goethe, the king of German literature, held court, surrounded by Herder, Wieland, and Schiller, and received visitors from all countries of the world. It was here that he housed his huge art collections, that he occupied the posts of privy counsellor, minister of finances and forestry, manager of the theatre, and chancellor of the University of Jena. And it was here that he carried on his seemingly endless correspondence with men of letters and scientists, and that he did extended research in archeology, mineralogy, botany, zoology, anatomy, optics, and physics. And, last but not least, it was here that he loved and was loved and, to the shock of the gossiping burghers of the little town, married the young Christiane, with whom he had already been living for seventeen years in his own house. What a man!

If those who are studying the personality of genius are in need of material, they will find it abundantly in Goethe. From Beethoven to Napoleon and Heine, they all felt it; and the