

raphy, and James Truslow Adams on his methods as historian.

For a collection of thirty-five pieces, this book contains a minimum of dead wood and surely belongs on the writer's shelf. No statement in it is more pertinent, for any literary medium, than Dr. Canby's observation: "You cannot possibly write as you would like to write unless you are as honest as possible with yourself. . . . That is precisely why so much writing dies an early death. The truth is not in it."

A Scientific Rhetoric

THE ART OF READABLE WRITING.
By Rudolf Flesch. New York: Har-
per & Bros. 237 pp. \$3.

By GORHAM MUNSON

DR. FLESCH has written a new kind of rhetoric which he calls—rightly, I think—a scientific rhetoric. He approaches the art of writing through the readability laboratory, frankly acknowledging his debt to the late Dr. Edward L. Thorndike, and he has evolved a formula of his own that can be used to pre-test writing for ease in reading and for interest. He is armed with facts and statistics, and he is blessed with all the talents of a good literary critic or an editor. He has curiosity, a lively mind, a sensitive ear, and a sense of humor. When he applies his scientific approach, he becomes a first-rate editor talking to a prospective contributor.

The gist of "The Art of Readable Writing" is in Chapter XIII, which is called "R for Readability." First, take a good look at "the reader over your shoulder." Among the books Dr. Flesch recommends is that painstaking brief for the reader which Robert Graves and Alan Hodge wrote some years ago: "The Reader Over Your Shoulder." Second, collect your material. Dr. Flesch quotes Schopenhauer with approval: "The first rule for a good style is to have something to say." Next, "when you have all the stuff you need, stop for a while and do something else." Dr. Flesch has a whole chapter on flashes from the "unconscious." Next, find the "shape" of your proposed piece of writing. Here Dr. Flesch supports himself by Gestalt psychology. Then start writing, using plenty of narrative and dialogue, even though you are writing non-fiction. Finally, keep your sentences short (sentences have been shrinking since Elizabethan days) and keep your words short.

It will be seen from this that Dr. Flesch is an advocate of the simple style. In fact, he's an extreme advocate. In the field of writing, he's an

extreme democrat. In an age of poor, hasty, distracted readers, he wastes no time berating readers for "the decline of attention" but concentrates on showing how to catch the attention of the inattentive, how to hold the lazy, and how to print a strong impression on the passive. But it happens that the ways and means Dr. Flesch recommends for catching, holding, and impressing a poor reader are ways and means that will improve the writing of a great many writers. He gives no piece of advice that would debase the currency of the written word.

True, one has to be a little on guard against his extremism. In Chapter I he tosses Aristotle out the window as a rhetoric teacher for moderns. Quoting with praise a column by a newspaper writer, Hal Boyle, Dr. Flesch says that you cannot detect in it the old standbys of unity, coherence, and emphasis (I could). But only sixteen pages later, he is telling his student-readers that their writing must have a "firm framework" (I infer that he means it must have unity and coherence) and just four pages further on, he explains the importance of "focus" (emphasis?). Aristotle seems to have slipped back into the classroom.

Moreover, to use what Dr. Flesch calls a "heavy connective," "The Art of Readable Writing" pays no attention to the limitations of plain-talk style. In the heaven of literature there are many mansions, and an admiration for the beautiful strength and simplicity of Swift's style need not war against an admiration for the beautiful sinuosity and complexity of Proust's style. Not all of a reader's consciousness can be engaged by the plain style; there are stately emotions that require stately language; beyond the art of communication there is an art of evocation, the inimitable Scriptures of East and West.

"Write as you talk," says Dr. Flesch. No, not quite. Write as you would ideally talk. It was Thoreau, whom Dr. Flesch esteems as a master of plain style, who said: "We speak our mother tongue; we write our father tongue." Writing is the perfecting of speech, and sometimes it is the perfecting of plain talk, and sometimes it is the perfecting of that "educated speech" manifested in both the prose and poetry of T. S. Eliot.

Through the strategic advisory posts he has held, Dr. Flesch's influence on American journalism has been great and is growing. It is, on the whole, a beneficent influence, and the aristocratic school of writing can take care of itself.

Gorham Munson, a veteran editor, is author of "The Written Word."

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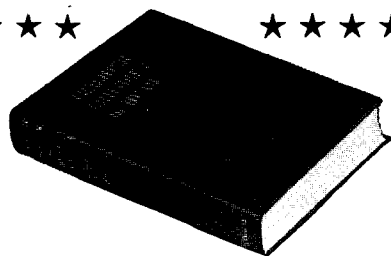
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EDUCATION

(Continued from page 31)

the skirting of criticism and analysis results in a surface portrait. This reader also would question the emphasis put on Madame Chiang Kai-shek. The handwriting on the Wall of China indicated some time ago that the repository of democracy in the Orient was not in the Generalissimo and his lady, but in the latter's elder sister, the widow of Sun Yat-sen, and such spokesmen as Sumie Seo Mishima, '27, who in a postwar meeting of the

Wellesley Club of Tokyo remarked: "Impoverished as we are, we have been given freedom of thought, action, and speech. It is time for us as American-educated Japanese to make full use of our American education and to quicken the democratic rebirth of the nation. . . ." That would have pleased Henry Fowle Durant, who envisioned his girls as missionaries and teachers and gave them an abiding motto: "Non Ministrari sed Ministrare."

Looking at Our Youngest Generation

ELIZABETH B. HURLOCK

THESE ARE YOUR CHILDREN.

How They Develop and How to Guide Them. By Gladys G. Jenkins, Helen Shacter, and William W. Bauer. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co. 192 pp. \$3.50.

"THESE ARE YOUR CHILDREN"

describes the typical behavior of normal, everyday children from five years of age to adolescence. To make the material presented to parents seem more realistic, case histories of children are used to illustrate typical behavior at each age level. Photographs of children in home, school, and neighborhood settings, doing things characteristic of their ages, add another lifelike touch to the scientific material.

There are many books available today which tell parents what to expect in the pre-school child and how to deal with any and every problem which may arise during this period. There is a rapidly growing number of books of a similar sort dealing with the adolescent years. But the between-period, from five to twelve or thirteen years, is the neglected period of childhood. In spite of its importance as a foundation age, little information has been given to help parents to guide

their children's development wisely. That is the main function of this book.

Three of the most interesting features of this book are the chart in which detailed lists are given of physical development, characteristic reaction, and special needs from the pre-school years into adolescence; lists of concepts that can be developed at each age to build mental, social, and physical health; and, finally, the questions given to encourage discussion of the subject matter of each chapter which will make this book suitable to use for parent-education groups.

CHILDREN KNOW THEIR FRIENDS.

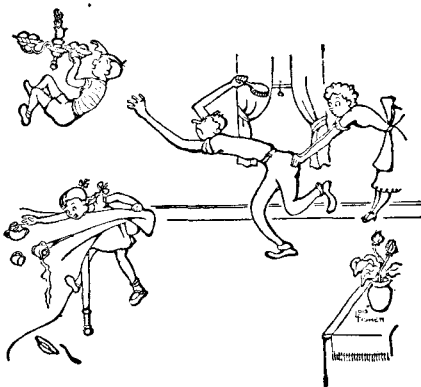
By Ruth Wendell Washburn. New York: William Morrow & Co. 192 pp. \$2.50.

The major theme of "Children Know Their Friends," by Ruth Washburn, as it was of her earlier book, "Children Have Their Reasons," is that to understand children you must see the world through their eyes. And, to do this best, you must listen to children's comments and questions which give an understanding of their thoughts.

With this fundamental principle, Miss Washburn has presented information regarding the child's growth in awareness by using comments and questions which she has collected over a period of years. Though presented as individual case histories, the stories are actually composite portraits of a great number of children.

The book is divided into eight major topics of child behavior, each of which is certain to be of interest to parents and teachers. These include such subjects as the relationship between brothers and sisters, getting on with teachers, neighbors and friendships, and play or work.

While the material of this book is



The Saturday Review