

art begins, no matter how far on from there it may go and no matter to what extent all sorts of other things may become involved in it. There is nothing wrong, he says elsewhere, with "art for art's sake," though there is a great deal wrong with the assumption that nothing except art is important; and probably that little problem has never been more neatly disposed of. If the artist or even the mere lover of the arts is sometimes inclined to give up the whole matter of artistic education and to conclude that since most people care nothing about it there is no reason why he should attempt to make them, he cannot really follow that inclination because the higher pleasures are a kind of religion and the impulse to pass them on is irresistible. Yet, as Mr. Forster says elsewhere, "a writer's duty often exceeds any duty he owes to society" and if he finds "the ideals of his age" hateful "he often ought to lead a forlorn retreat." Still again: "Our chief duty is to enjoy ourselves and not to lose heart, and to spread culture not because we love our fellow men, but because certain things seem to us unique and priceless, and, as it were, push us out into the world on their service."

Not everyone, certainly not every "liberal," will find such ideas congenial. But at least even such should be willing to admit that Mr. Forster has a rare combination of virtues: detachment enough to see clearly; involvement enough to understand what the issue is. He may be the proprietor of an ivory tower, but he is not shut up in it. Towers can also be used to look out from.

Seeking a Poet's Inspiration

THE RIDDLE OF EMILY DICKINSON. By Rebecca Patterson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 434 pp. \$4.50.

By RICHARD CHASE

THIS is another one of those books about Emily Dickinson which assumes that she could have written her poems only as a response to a frustrated love affair, that most of the poems, even when they seem to be about nature or death, are really love poems, and that the language of the poems is a cryptic shorthand carefully calculated to conceal the identity of the beloved person they refer to. Since there is unfortunately no evidence sufficiently reliable either to prove the existence or establish the identity of the Great Lover, the only alternative, for those who insist on a Great Lover, is to choose one by intuition and then search about for corroboration.

Mrs. Patterson believes that the poet's lover was a woman. And this constitutes her uniqueness among such Dickinson biographers as Josephine Pollitt and Genevieve Taggard, who advanced male candidates. Also unparalleled is the sheer volume of perverse wilfulness with which Mrs. Patterson amasses her loosely circumstantial "evidence." And unlike Miss Taggard at least, she offers the reader very little by way of criticism, scholarship, or commentary which does not stand or fall with her interpretation.

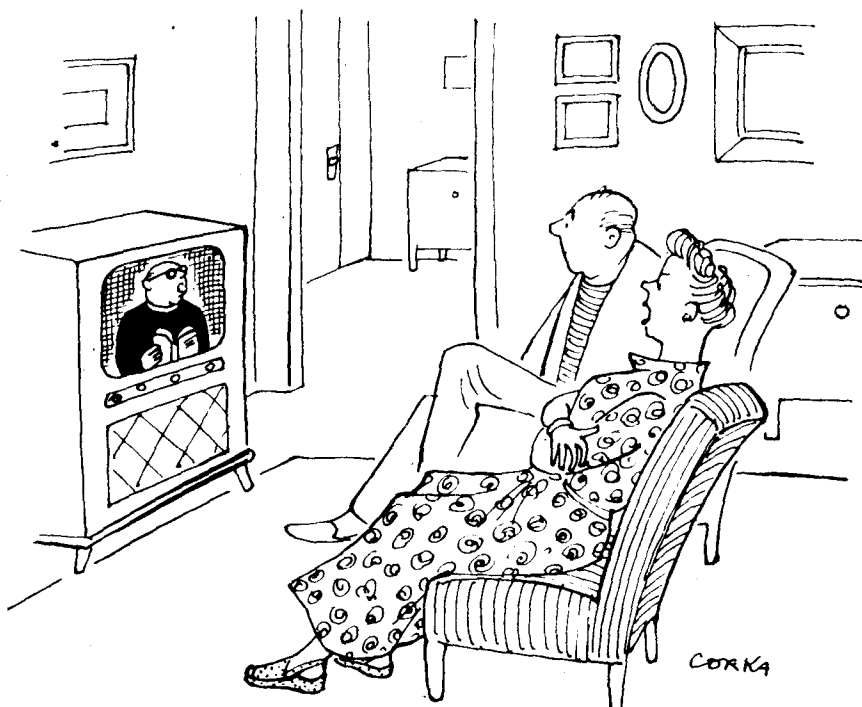
In Mrs. Patterson's opinion the

lover was Kate Scott (later Mrs. Turner and still later Mrs. Anthon), to whom Emily Dickinson wrote several letters which declare an ardent friendship, though hardly more ardent than that declared in other letters to other women. In the period of 1859-1861, the author has convinced herself, the two young women, both feeling "their painful difference from society," fell in love, allowed themselves a trembling encounter upon a "crucial night," and then parted in a manner which left Emily with the conviction that she had been deserted.

Mrs. Patterson accounts for the fact that some of the so-called love poems are addressed to a man by ingeniously supposing that the poet carefully substituted masculine pronouns for feminine. She believes that several poems addressed to women were not published until 1945, in "Bolts of Melody," because they were suppressed by the Dickinson family in order to avoid scandal, although a much more obvious reason is that they are nearly all very inferior poems. Nor does Mrs. Patterson prove that they were all addressed to one woman, nor that any of them was addressed to Kate Scott, nor that they are love poems. Her central piece of evidence is a poem beginning "I shall not murmur if at last," in which a person named Katie is addressed. Yet Mrs. Patterson herself admits that Emily Dickinson knew several Katies. And in any case the biographer has misread the poem, choosing to believe that Emily is accusing Katie of "treason," whereas an objective reading of the poem, taking every fact into consideration, indicates that the poet is speaking metaphorically of her secluded life as having been a kind of "treason" committed against "those I loved below"—that is, against her friends in general. And the book is a tissue of such misreadings, together with an imposing array of unrelated facts and conjectures.

George F. Whicher's "This Was a Poet" remains the only reliable biography. As for the "lover," in so far as there was one, we shall evidently have to be content with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. The sentiment he shared with Emily Dickinson was of a kind not unknown elsewhere in late nineteenth-century America, a love that gained all its intensity from its own renunciation.

Richard Chase, a member of the English department of Columbia University, is the author of "Herman Melville: A Critical Study."



"It's all right, but I miss seeing what people are wearing."

Interpreting Genius

TURN WEST, TURN EAST. By Henry Seidel Canby. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 318 pp. \$3.50.

By JAMES GRAY

DR. CANBY'S study of Mark Twain and Henry James, done in Plutarch's way of offering parallel interpretations, is much the most illuminating of all his critical investigation. It should help to dispel the fog of misapprehension into which the perverse ingenuities of certain bright, tormented minds have tended to drag both reputations.

The point of similarity around which the literary careers of the two men made concentric circles (to modify Dr. Canby's figure) was to discover and to describe that essence of American individuality which each called "innocent." So far from being belittling, the adjective connoted for Mark Twain freshness of outlook, untainted, uncorrupted force and, for Henry James, "a great capacity for life," as he said of one of his characters, seeking "the precious experience somehow encompassed."

Neither man had the experience, the temperamental equipment, or the reckless wish to try to dramatize this force in terms of its broadest reference to the contemporary life of business, politics, or social conflict. But each had a glimpse of its significance. Mark Twain turned west to see it in action and, in his best work, presented it vividly against the background of a young world, a society in the making. Henry James turned east, to Europe, to watch this force as it was enriched by old world culture, shocked by old world compromise, yet brought to "finer vibration" by old world tension.

Each did what an artist must learn to do, which is to work within the limits of his talent to give expression to values that touch universal experience. In the course of a flurried self-discipline Mark Twain achieved certain full and happy revelations of his truth and of his talent. Later, he lost his way, lost his faith, and ended with a kind of calamitous success against which the neurotic in him protested bitterly. Henry James faltered, entered into unsuitable experiments, and only toward the end of his life fell perfectly into step with "the large and confident action" that made him able to rejoice in his gift. But all the while each was exploring the innocent civilization of America to dis-

James Gray is professor of English at the University of Minnesota.



cover something of its latent genius.

Now, as Dr. Canby does not fail to point out, we are "innocents abroad" once more in world drama, with responsibility added to curiosity, and we may well pause, even in this crowded hour, to listen to what Twain and James have to tell us of ourselves.

The device of tracing parallel lives gives Dr. Canby an opportunity to trace also the development of talents through contrast and comparison. All that he has to say is expressed strikingly. Though little of his criticism may be new to close students of Mark Twain and of Henry James, his attitudes are put forward with a witty authority that is needed, even in this moment of revival for both reputations, to clarify much-debated matters. Among the points Canby makes about James are these: he was no trivial snob who repudiated his American tradition for one that was considered to be more stately when he adopted English citizenship; he was a wit who dropped into the boiling rapids of his rhetoric brilliant jewels of phrase-making; he learned much from the theatre and so became the universal uncle (it would be inept to speak of so aloof a man as a father) of the dramatic method in the novel; his influence pervades the work of latter-day artists, even those who may never have read him at all.

Mark Twain, Dr. Canby suggests, was somehow all of a piece in his faults as in his virtues. His spirit was a boy's spirit; his tragedy was that of finding it impossible to encompass adult experience either on paper or in its bitter actuality.

It seems to me that Dr. Canby has never been in company more sympathetic to his own gifts as interpreter. On other occasions one has noted in him a kind of strained amiability as he has undertaken to cope with large, unruly talents. Here he has achieved that spontaneous identification with his material which, in criticism as in creative work, is the ally of moving and revealing analysis.

Questing Philosopher

UNDER WHATEVER SKY. By Irwin Edman. New York: Viking Press. 246 pp. \$3.

By DAVID MCCORD

THE DEATH of the familiar essay has been rumored if not announced. In America it has remained in a state of suspense for at least ten years, but any reader of the *London Times* or the *Manchester Guardian* has known right along that the form will survive in England. It was doing a brisk trade here at home as late as the Twenties and even into the early Thirties. But the age of the universal wise-crack has set new standards of brevity as well as cheapness, and the age of the intellectual Cassandra is not interested in the casual, suggestive, or fissionable idea. Furthermore, the familiar essay is too exhaustive for the tabloid mind and too trivial for the triple thinker. As to that, the very adjective "familiar" is a poor advertisement for the product. In a time when words as unfamiliar as supersonics and Geiger counters are much too familiar, what chance has the antimacassar essence in itself? But the point is that the essay is far from dead.

In the midst of decline it was E. B. White who really brought new life to the essay form. On a diet of sheep dip and silage he gave it health and strength and wit and brilliance for which the shoddy writing of our day was unprepared. Of all White Papers, his deserve the ruined adjective "inimitable," for they are inimitable. Beside Mr. White, only the more global Brooks Atkinson, using an entirely different style and approach, can bring Kieran's warbler into the city and dock the *Queen Mary* under a yellow birch. Mr. Atkinson, like J. B. Priestley in "Delight," has recently settled for the shorter form of the essay, and his "Once Around the Sun" ought to continue on its course for as long a time as the accepted classic, "An Almanack for Moderns."

A third essayist of special intelligence and individual charm is, of course, the gifted author of "Under Whatever Sky." Mr. Edman in several books of extended essay structure has established himself as the questing philosopher. Ahead of both Mr. Atkinson and Mr. Priestley, Mr. Edman for seven years has been writing the short

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David McCord, executive secretary of the Harvard Fund Council, is the author of several volumes of verse.