

land campaigns. We have a full account of the Battle of the Nile, at which Napoleon was not present, and the skimpiest account of a victory like Mont-Thaber which Napoleon won in person. No doubt in its consequences the Nile was more important than Mont-Thaber, but this is, after all, a biography, not a general history. And it might be said that Mr. Thompson devotes too little space to discussing Napoleon as a soldier. It was as a soldier he began, as a soldier he fell. We hear of the victories but we hardly understand them.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this admirable book is the discussion of the moral and political weaknesses of the Empire, weaknesses that flowed from flaws in the character and judgment of the Emperor. This was most notable in the treatment of the Church where Napoleon threw away most of the advantages he had gained from the Concordat both in "old" France and in the new and very Catholic departments like Flanders and the Rhineland where he alienated a population otherwise very ready to be loyal. Indeed, the unexpected hero

of the resistance to Napoleon is Pope Pius VII.

It is impossible to ponder the fall of Napoleon without speculating on its consequences. Had he died at any time before 1812, would the France of the "natural frontiers" have survived? If it had, the imbalance between France and Germany would never have arisen and France, with the Belgian coal field, would have been industrialized far sooner. And with millions of Flemings and Germans in "France," French nationalism would have been a more cosmopolitan thing.

These speculations have no direct utility, but it is part of the fascination of Napoleon that even a bad book can provoke them, and this is a very good book. Yet the mystery of the man remains and I am reminded of one of the oddest of all verdicts on him. When the news came of his death, ex-King Joseph was interviewed in his New Jersey home. With all the fatuity of an elder brother, he handed down his decision. The world was all wrong. "My brother was not so much a great as a good man."

Now, Afar Off

USHANT. By Conrad Aiken. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 365 pp. \$4.50.

By W. T. Scott

AS LONG ago as the First World War, Conrad Aiken was writing of the poet as being "a curious blending of the psychoanalyst and patient." In novels, short stories, and a prolific poetry, all Aiken's work has exemplified the doctrine. He very early grafted upon traditional romanticism the golden bough of Freud. And somehow the undeviating process has made him one of the most distinguished unassessed writers of our era—perhaps the most distinguished.

In "Ushant," an autobiographical essay, Aiken has again created a multi-level complexity in which the author is both the man on the couch talking and the observer listening to the man. The title is the dare: it puns on "You shan't!" Since he has cast himself as "D.," after "Demarest" of his novel "Blue Voyage," a recently published letter, written to Malcolm Cowley in 1927 and defending the method of that novel, is worth recalling, for the method of this much greater book is similar. Aiken asserted:

"I can't feel any esthetic or moral error in the casting of an autobiographical theme into the third person; in fact, I believe it is possible to be more *detachedly* honest in this form (if you insist on honesty as a prime criterion) than in straight confession . . . I mean to give myself away, for the benefit of any stray psychologist of literature . . . and incidentally to twist the thing into a design of its own, to make it stand on its own legs as an organism."

Note that the purpose is confession in a form of art. In its essences "Ushant" is as naked a giving away of the self as Adam; but this Adam-Aiken, this "D.," is so projected as to seem objectified.

"Ushant" has four major themes: ancestry, art, sex, home. Aiken's boyhood in Savannah ended, at eleven, with the ghastly tragedy of his parents' death: murder and suicide, by his father—"the two loud pistol-shots; and he had tiptoed into the dark room, where the two bodies lay motionless, and apart, and, finding them dead, found himself possessed of them forever." Separated from his two

W.T. Scott, former book review editor of the Providence Journal, wrote "Mr. Whittier and Other Poems."

New & Noteworthy

This week again far more books are being published than we have room to review. We hope to be able to discuss the following titles at more length in early issues.

AMY VANDERBILT'S COMPLETE BOOK OF ETIQUETTE. By Amy Vanderbilt. New York: Doubleday & Co. \$5. A new and thorough guide to *comme il faut*.

BOLAHUN: An African Adventure. By Werner Junge. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$3.75. A German physician tells how he established and operated a hospital in the Liberian jungle.

CRAZY-WHITE-MAN. By Richard Morenus. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co. \$3.75. An account of the six years a New York writer spent among the primitive Indians of northern Ontario.

FORTY ACRES AND NO MULE. By Janice Holt Giles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. \$3. The author of "The Enduring Hills" tells of her marriage and more than simple life on a Kentucky ridge.

HEMINGWAY: THE WRITER AS ARTIST. By Carlos Baker. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press. \$4.50. A careful, critical study.

HOW THIN THE VEIL. By Jack Kerkhoff. New York: Greenberg Publisher. \$3. An account of the forty-five days the author, a newspaperman, spent in a Michigan State Hospital.

ISOLATION AND ALLIANCES. By Walter Lippmann. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$1.50. A new analysis of foreign policy by the well-known journalist and publicist.

KOREAN TALES. By Melvin B. Voorhees. New York: Simon & Schuster. \$3. Sketches of life on the Korean front by a former newspaperman attached to the Eighth U. S. Army in Korea.

LANGUAGE AS GESTURE. By R. P. Blackmur. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$5.75. Essays on poets and poetry.

LATE ARRIVAL. By E. M. Almedingen. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. \$4. Fragment of an autobiography by a Russian refugee in Italy, France, and England.

THE LIFE AND GOOD TIMES OF WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST. By John

Tebbel. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$4. A gossip biography.

LIGHT ON A DARK HORSE. By Roy Campbell. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co. \$4. Autobiography of a South African who achieved some reputation as a writer in England.

MAHATMA GANDHI. By Haridas T. Mazumdar. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2. An exposition of the philosophy and life of the Indian leader.

MAN AGAINST CANCER. By Dr. I. Berenblum. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. \$3. An account of current cancer research written in non-technical terms.

MCCARTHY: THE MAN, THE SENATOR, THE "ISM". By Ronald Jack and May Anderson. Boston: Beacon Press. \$3.50. The life of the controversial Senator from Wisconsin written by two journalists who are not admirers.

MYTHS AND REALITIES. By Carl Bridenbaugh. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. \$3.25. Essays on the society of the South during the colonial period.

NATURE'S MESSAGES. By Sam Campbell. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co. \$3.50. The philosophy of a naturalist and lecturer.

ONE-UPMANSHIP. By Stephen Potter. New York: Henry Holt & Co. \$2.75. Satire on a variety of subjects by the author of "Gamesmanship."

THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING. By Norman Vincent Peale. New York: Prentice-Hall. \$2.95. Inspirational essays on how to build confidence and use it in every-day living.

STRANGE EMPIRE. By Joseph Kinsey Howard. New York: William Morrow & Co. \$6. The story of an independent state which defied the Canadian authorities for ten months in 1870.

THE SECRET SELF. By Theodor Reik. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young. \$3.50. A casebook in psychology as practised by Dr. Reik.

VICTORIAN FURNITURE. By F. Gordon Roe. New York: Roy Publishers. \$5. A guide book with some claim to literary distinction.

younger brothers, he was brought up in his ancestral Massachusetts—New Bedford, Concord, Cambridge, the Cape—amidst a bevy of old houses and of aunts, uncles, and cousins. These inspire pages of "Ushant" which triumphantly communicate their wonder: the Frightened Uncle, naturalist and librarian, whose shy failure of a life is so poignantly summarized in monologue; old Aunt Jean, who still kept a cow even when it had to be driven to pasture through the crowding New Bedford streets; precise Aunt Sibyl and her profligate husband, that robust Beloved Uncle; rich Cousin Maud, much-traveled; the little Grandmother Aiken who so renewed life in her widowhood. The boy's two families, Potters and Aikens, were related, and an indigenous, individual tribe they made. The humor and compassion with which they are re-created also, happily, inform all the pages of "Ushant." It is often—among other things—great fun.

Aiken's bookishness was well established before he left Savannah. He was haunted by the epigraph from "Tom Brown's Schooldays"—"I'm the poet of White Horse Vale, sir, with Liberal notions under my cap!" What was a poet? He set out, soon, to be one. His autobiography is not the kind to make an eventual biography supererogatory, but its readers may detect real enough portraits, under fictional names, of such literary associates at T. S. Eliot, John Gould Fletcher, Malcolm Lowry—and discover some chitchat, without disguise, of Rupert Brooke, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and others. "Ushant" is only incidentally that kind of book, save in the in-



William Saroyan—"pushes into middle age."

tensely personal father-son relationship with "Hambo."

His three wives—his "Loreleis" as he insists on terming them—are not clearly seen; not so clearly as some of the "Loreliebchens" outside the marriages. (I suppose there has to be some blockage somewhere.) The intention, however, is honesty in recall of his sexual adventures, no matter how deeply his conscience or his vanity be appalled. This extends, also, to a period when an "imbalance" which, he recognizes, often threatened him, led to his nearly successful suicide.

The chord, the theme, which resolves the book is the sense of belonging. His passion for England dominated much of his life: England was his "Ariel's Island," his mother, his true home, and there he lived many years. But at last, at first by necessity, then with tentative acceptance, finally with moving rediscovery (of the father), he found ancestral New England again as his rooted past, his great good place.

A review can only point to the bare themes. It must omit the music. Here is an autobiography whose intention, like that of a poem, is to be no mere record but, rather, a created, living thing; the mutability of life shuttling through a racing, tumultuous language, adverbial as a brook. If the romantic ego self-committed to the clinic never can forsake certain dramas of masochism which cannot be the whole truth, this yet seems innate, unavoidable; the flaw is not without its truth and, even, its inadvertent suggestions as to how other people reacted in these events. Certainly in its richness of conception and language "Ushant" is a remarkable achievement; barring always the finest of Aiken's poems, this is his masterpiece.

The Grapes & the Sea

THE BICYCLE RIDER IN BEVERLY HILLS. By William Saroyan. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 178 pp. \$3.

By OSCAR HANDLIN

MORE so even than his earlier works, this is a book about Saroyan.

The young man pushes into middle age. He sees a son repeat the experiences of his own youth; and, wondering at the meaning of those experiences, wanders away into reminiscence.

The result is a book without a beginning and without an end, for it is a record of the things that come to mind as Saroyan thinks back from the present to the past. Concrete objects make their appearance first: the bicycle, the phonograph, the typewriter, the fire, the streets. To these are attached persons and incidents: the members of the family and of the Fresno Armenian community, how it was to deliver telegrams or to sleep in the orphanage dormitory. Woven around these objects, persons, and incidents are reflections on their meaning in the development of Saroyan as man and artist.

Saroyan's gift is that of the affectionate encounter. The succession of small things that surround him win his sympathy and love and move him to the effort of comprehension. There is a freshness in his approach akin to innocence, and that enables him to communicate the sense of for the first time seeing, for the first time understanding, the specific qualities of people and places.

This is a gift that sustains the writing of brief passages. Often enough to be rewarding, the book contains vivid descriptions of such events and characters—of the old Armenian actor, of the teacher in school, of the unsuccessful poet, of the clothing salesman late to the fire. In these paragraphs, Saroyan conveys an understanding of detail that is meaningful and convincing. Direct and simple language and a knack for the apposite phrase are appropriate to the dimensions within which his perceptions operate.

This is something. But it is not very much. Certainly, it is not enough
(Continued on page 48)

The Truth, O Mortal

By Gustav Davidson

THE truth, O mortal, thou shalt never learn.
Pursue illusions. With dim raptures burn.

Escape the world. Dwell in an ivory tower.
In myth and fable live thy fleeting hour.

Here thou art lost. Thou gropest like one blind
For ends and beginnings thou canst never find

Save in illusions—thy one hope of flight
From this vast prison-house of sense and sight.

Oscar Handlin is the author of the Pulitzer-Prize-winning book "The Unrooted," which deals with the great migrations to America. He is professor of history at Harvard University.