

his right mind would want to neglect such figures as Louis Sullivan's teacher, Frank Furness, or Wilson Eyre, Jr., who was so happily inspired by William Morris's friend Philip Webb.

Incidentally, if you are not familiar with all of the architects under discussion the fault may not be altogether your own. It is not every day that you can pick up an architectural history like this, a book which all students of the subject will consider essential, and which any one of us with a taste for Philadelphia can enjoy.

—WAYNE ANDREWS.

YALE'S HOME TOWN: The account of events in the life of a provincial American city Rollin G. Osterweis gives in *"Three Centuries of New Haven"* (Yale University Press, \$6) is concrete, accurate, and comprehensive. New Haven, one of America's oldest cities (1638), grew slowly from colonial Puritan beginnings to its present rank as fifty-ninth city in the United States, a city of limited industrial expansion and great civic and educational advance. Like the expert historical painter, the author creates a pageant which is colorful, vivid, and interesting. Complemented by superb type design and excellent illustrations, the work sets a new standard for urban history.

But why is it that New Haven's industrial expansion in every period has been so limited and conversely its civic and educational progress so constant? Why is it that the issues which so plague the modern industrial metropolis have so little effect on New Haven? Apparently the even tenor of the city's life takes little heed of racial discrimination, political corruption, labor organization, or banking finance.

Because his emphasis upon the correlation of local and national history yields such impressive results, one wishes that Mr. Osterweis had time to probe into American attitudes and their shadows in the Elm City. The curious vigor of the New Haven inventor, the delicate relationship of town and gown, the familial strength of the city's elite may all be nice variations of a national pattern which demands the sympathy of a lifelong resident and the analysis of a detached scholar to unravel, capacities which Professor Osterweis has amply demonstrated in the present work.

—ANTHONY N. B. GARVAN.

"AMERICA FIRST": With more than 800,000 members, most of them in the Chicago Tribune area, the America First Committee led the battle in 1940-41 against intervention by the

(Continued on page 41)

FICTION

King Mark's Roving Queen

"The Enchanted Cup," by Dorothy James Roberts (Appleton-Century-Crofts. 368 pp. \$3.75), is a retelling of the perennially popular romance of Tristram and Iseult.

By Ben Ray Redman

IN *"The Enchanted Cup"* Dorothy James Roberts gives us one more version of a tale that has been written times beyond counting; a tale that was already old when Thomas and Béroul told it in the twelfth century, when Gottfried von Strassburg translated and perfected it in the thirteenth; a tale that is fairly described by its latest publishers as "the most splendid love story of the Western world." Whoever tries to tell this story in these later days issues a brave challenge, and faces an ordeal by comparison. Wagner, in his own medium, survived the test triumphantly. Edwin Arlington Robinson endowed the legend with new poetic beauties and new psychological depths. Hardy's *"The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall"* is but one respectable failure among many. And Miss Roberts?

She has written a prose narrative that should please readers who have little previous acquaintance with *Tristram* and the two *Iseults*; and not displease those whose knowledge of the three doomed lovers is considerable. She is good at description, particularly landscape—the marshes of Lyonesse, Tintagel's cliffs, the headlands and green turf of Ireland are visible in her pages. She is competent in the drawing of character. Her dialogue is easy and believable, innocent of studied archaism. Her style in general is unaffected, and never high-flown. Her sense of proportion is usually excellent, her transitions are smooth. She is not bad when it comes to battle, mayhem, and sudden death. But whatever of passion and poetry there may be in *"The En-*



—Bradford Bachrach.

D. J. Roberts—"unaffected."

chanted Cup" is there by inheritance—Miss Roberts has made no contribution of her own.

She has followed, in the main, the tale of *Tristram* as it is found in Malory's *"Le Morte d'Arthur,"* because, as she says, this rendering "has had more appeal for the present storyteller than earlier, purer versions." Like Malory, and unlike Robinson, she has cheapened the character of King Mark, and thereby made impossible the high tragedy that results when he is depicted as a man of nobility and understanding. Like Malory, and unlike Robinson, she has failed to make the most of the amorous rivalry of *Iseult of Ireland* and *Iseult of Brittany*; and she has chosen a version of *Tristram's* death that robs her of the immortal drama of the white sail and the black. Malory killed off *Tristram* almost as an afterthought, in the course of a knightly roll call; Miss Roberts kills him in a final paragraph, without dramatic preparation. But she has refused to pass along much of Malory's dross. She has ignored the shabby Segwarides affair, she has not seen fit to have her hero chop off a lady's head at Castle Pleure, and she has spared *Tristram* and her readers much dull, redundant fighting. She has, to sum it all up, written a novel that should be popular for at least a season—but not, I think, a novel that enters the lists of literature.



The English Heir

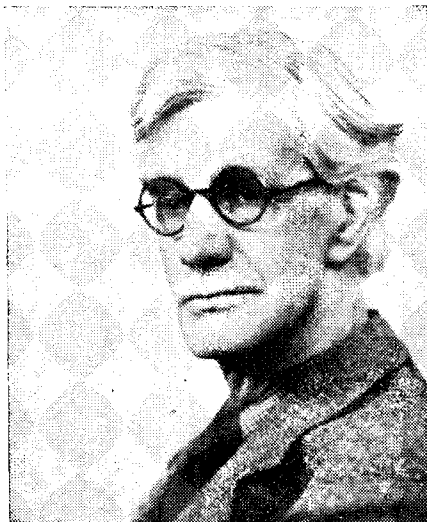
Howard Spring's "A Sunset Touch" (Harper, 308 pp. \$3.50) tells of the awakening of a British bank clerk with an ancestor obsession to the pleasures and vexations of twentieth-century reality.

By James Kelly

IN his new novel, "A Sunset Touch," Howard Spring has built an oddly forbidding Georgian house with the shades drawn and weeds in the yard. Inside it there is an untidy hodgepodge of Smollett antique and Spillane modern. And the master of it all is a timid forty-five-year-old sawdust man who lives in the twentieth century, looks with extended nostalgia at the eighteenth century, and plainly belongs to neither.

Roger Menheniot, "the last of the Georgians," comes to us first as a threadbare London bank clerk with a family fixation. And when an American soldier with the same name wills him a fortune Roger is free to buy "Rosemullion," the ancient family seat in Cornwall. With power and tradition in his grasp, Roger begins to rub his eyes and wake up. He is then deflowered by a passing prostitute, enraptured by a virginal spinster, and educated by worldly-wise villagers. In the end it looks very much as if the Master of Rosemullion will adjust to the world he lives in after getting off to a miserable start.

The trouble for many readers of "A Sunset Touch" (title from "Bishop Blougram's Apology," by Browning) will be that they cannot relate themselves to the principal characters. Menheniot seems too meaningless and his sexual meanderings too trivial a cure for what ails him. Bella Thoroughgood, the good-time girl, comes straight from pulp fiction. Heroine Kitty Littledale, the village spinster, is descended from Charlotte



Howard Spring—"abandoned houses."

Brontë, and Henry Savage, the crazed old vicar, derives from a composite of all the English novelists who have admired Goldsmith. At one point Menheniot sternly warns himself: "Don't be a fool. Don't wrap yourself up in *where* you are. Come out of your parcel and look at *what* you are." Unfortunately, he never quite manages to take his own heroic prescription.

With previous novels such as "My Son, My Son!" and "Fame is the Spur" Mr. Spring has won a good foothold on both sides of the ocean as an avuncular storyteller with lyric gifts. At times, though, his lyricism has faded into sentimentality, his story has become a charade, and his characterizations have run the gamut from Dickensian subtlety to pulp banality. Blessed with a fine sense of place, his reverence for English history and his genuine understanding of inhabitants of the beloved Cornish countryside have helped him over the usual novelist's problems of form and flow.

Unhappily for Springians, "A Sunset Touch" offers too much of its author's weakness, too little of his strength. Patches of human warmth and blunt sexcapades decorate the story like oases in a drought area, but they are not enough. Mr. Spring views his people dimly and morosely. They, in turn, putter through the tasks set for them without much enthusiasm and without any real belief that they are getting anywhere. Intending to write a warm, evocative novel of human awakening, he has merely assembled a flaccid pastoral which turns upon coincidence and loses its way in antiquarian detail.

Here's a novel for the special reader who likes to poke around in old abandoned houses and is prepared to be interested in *whatever* he finds.

Self-Destructors

Charles Jackson's "Earthly Creatures" (240 pp. Clothbound, Farrar, Straus, & Young, \$1.50. Paperbound, Ballantine Books, 35¢) is a collection of short stories whose chief characters all have the same fundamental human failing.

By William Peden

THE central character of most of the short stories in Charles Jackson's "Earthly Creatures" is his own worst enemy. He turns up in many forms: as an adolescent boy, as a young woman, as a middleaged novelist, as an elderly mother. Something is either going wrong in his life, or has already gone wrong. Self-pitying and self-indulgent, he lashes out wildly at life. We watch him, in story after story, methodically going about the business of destroying himself. But he is seldom a fool, and herein lie the power and pathos of most of his stories.

Mr. Jackson's characters are human beings worthy of the love or security or understanding they need so desperately and seek so wildly. In most cases they are aware that in seeking to damage or destroy others they are destroying parts of themselves. Like the schizophrenic writer of "The Boy Who Ran Away"—one of the longest, most ambitious, and best stories in this collection—who hates his gawky nephew for possessing the very traits which had made his own childhood unhappy, they know what they do.

The writer knows that in depriving his children of their anticipated pleasures he is hurting them only temporarily; the damage he does to himself is irreparable. He hates himself for it, yet is powerless to do more than resort to another fifth, or to the ever-handy seconal. He is own "devil, his own black beast . . . he has quitted life, abdicated." He knows the truth but, alas, the truth does not set him free. A debased, half-emasculated, latter-day Prometheus, he is chained with bonds of his own forging, tearing endlessly at the exposed viscera of his own self-respect.

As his novels and earlier short stories have demonstrated, Mr. Jackson is a writer of palpable talent. He possesses a fine sense of humor (this, I think, has not been sufficiently recognized) and a facility for incisive characterization and caricature. What he does in a few lines with someone like "Brooksie," the professional gladiator of "The Cheat," is wonderful

The Lazuli Bunting

By Ethel Jacobson

LAZULI bunting! Bit of sky
Perched in the alder's eaves,
An azure sheen against the green
Of trembling leaves,
Bright swatch of heaven, bravely
hung
Where boughs bend low—
Celestial bird, Sign and Word,
We see, we know!