

Xenophon (the reception of the news of Aegospotami), and some seventy photographs, mostly of buildings on the Acropolis. Professor Robinson's introductory comments to his four main divisions amount to some twenty-five pages, and he has added a brief chronological summary and bibliography. In effect, then, his book is an anthology of the intellectual and artistic remains of Athens in the latter half of the fifth century B.C.

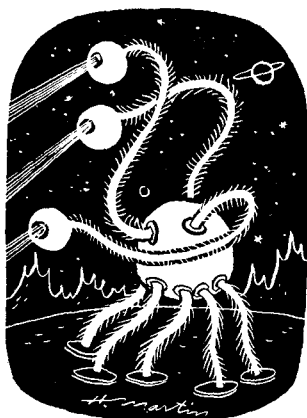
IT IS a mark of respect to the reader to give him original documents rather than a discussion of them, and no one can deny that the documents Professor Robinson has chosen are central. But we may question the adequacy of the book nevertheless. Whether (as I think likely) the reader who takes this book up is already familiar with these classics, or (as Professor Robinson apparently thinks) he encounters them, as everyone sometime must, for the first time, he should be given some more extended explication, particularly of the tragedies and the "Symposium." A new reader cannot apprehend more than the outer layer of these richly meaningful pieces without guidance, and a reader already familiar with them should at least be shown how they relate to the humanism which I take to be Professor Robinson's *leitmotif*. Without understanding in some depth they are, in Thucydides's phrase, display pieces for the moment, not a possession for evermore. Both the tragic poets and their readers are entitled to something better, in so sumptuous a volume, than the stale translations (except for Mendell's "Oedipus") which comprise three-fourths of this volume. For a school text, which students are *required* to read, and under guidance, Professor Robinson has presented fresher versions of six Greek plays at a fraction of the price. Considering current production costs this handsome volume with its lavish plates is not overpriced, and it will contribute effectively to the purpose for which it is designed. But, having once got the attention of "the general reader and him alone," to whom Professor Robinson addresses his book, it is something of a pity that he does not exploit his opportunity more fully.

Man's Origins

HOW THE MYTHS BEGAN: One of the most tantalizing of all speculations is about the origins of mankind and the myths associated with its religious beginnings. G. R. Levy has applied the perceptive, specialized techniques of
(Continued on page 37)

FICTION

The Season's Science Fiction



Fletcher Pratt, a prolific writer and anthologist of science fiction and fantasy, is constantly watching the field to keep SR readers posted on important new developments. Here he reports on nine volumes published during the past season which he feels most deserve the attention of discriminating readers.

By Fletcher Pratt

ON THE whole, it has been a rather poor season for science fiction and fantasy, though poorer for the latter than the former. The sudden check in the operations of Ballantine Books, which for a time was threatening to take over the whole field, is no doubt partly responsible; but so also is the fact that the specialty publishers, who depend almost entirely on reprinting "classics" from the magazines, and the anthologists, who are entirely dependent upon this source, have been running out of good material. Most of the recent anthologies are remarkable rather for ingenuity of concept than perfection of execution, and will convince none of the doubting Thomases that this literary form is something to be taken seriously.

There are, of course, honorable exceptions. One is Frederik Pohl's "Star Science Fiction Stories, No. 2" (Ballantine, paperbound, 35¢; clothbound, \$2), which by using only original stories by hand-picked authors beats most of the anthologists at their own game and quite outdoes the magazines at theirs. Another exception is the third "Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction" (Doubleday, \$3.25), which has become an annual under the editor-

ship of Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas. This anthology has the double advantage of not excluding pure fantasy, which gives it a much wider range than the rest, and of having been kept in mind by the twin editors from the beginning, so that when they got hold of a really hot story for their magazine they immediately exercised seignoral rights and let no one else have a chance at it for an anthology.

A third exception is the new Groff Conklin job, "Science Fiction Thinking Machines" (Vanguard, \$3.50), in which the editor has quite rightly broken the taboo against using stories that have appeared elsewhere in hard covers, and as a result has come up with a remarkably fine collection to illustrate the various lines of thought about robots (including Capek's "R.U.R." which started the whole thing), androids, and computers. A good part are more remarkable for the ideas expressed than for the stories—but for that matter, so is a good part of science fiction generally.

Of the collections of stories by a single author the only one really ranking with the best of other years is "Untouched by Human Hands," by Robert Sheckley (Ballantine, paperbound, 35¢). It has twelve short stories, mixed science fiction and fantasy, and every single one of them is right up to the John Collier level. If you want an introduction, try "The Demons."

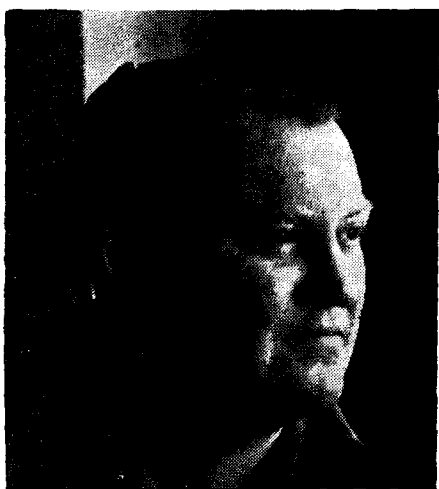
THERE has been a notable tendency on the part of the general publishers who have taken up science fiction to turn out books which have not appeared in magazines, and it is curious that two of the best, "Wild Talent," by Wilson Tucker (Rinehart, \$2.50), and "More Than Human," by Theodore Sturgeon (Farrar, Straus & Young, clothbound, \$2; Ballantine, paperbound, 35¢) should deal with the same theme in quite different ways. (Part of the Sturgeon book did see magazine publication, but only part, and that with a conclusion that leaves the book version incomparably the more satisfying and effective.) The theme is telepathy, telekinesis, and related matters, which seem to be getting a good deal of attention from science-fiction writers, and so far as I know Mr. Sturgeon is the first writer to produce a plausible theory of how these things could work in-

stead of merely saying they do. And purely as fiction, it's an extremely good story.

Another old hand, Isaac Asimov, weighed in with *"The Caves of Steel"* (Doubleday, \$2.95), which really accomplishes something various science-fiction writers have been trying to do for a long while—it tells a first-class detective story in terms of a future and very advanced technology. Even his robots are completely believable, and the cleverest distinction is drawn between their emotionlessness and the very real emotions of the humans involved.

Probably *"The Sinister Researches of C. P. Ransom,"* by H. Nearing, Jr. (Doubleday, \$2.95), also deserves mention among the better science fiction of the past season, although a good many readers will already be familiar with the ludicrous and improbable inventions of Professor Ransom and the trouble they get him into. In the book they are somewhat more talky than in the magazine version, but they have an integration the others lacked.

The only item of importance falling in the science-fiction field not by one of the old hands at the game is *"The Conquered Place,"* by Robert Shafer (Putnam, \$3.50). This is a grimish item about life in an America where all the country east of the Mississippi has been conquered, while along the line of the river there is a deadlock of exhaustion. The details could have come from Czechoslovakia or Poland; it is their application to American conditions and the author's infinite care in supplying and dovetailing together completely plausible items that makes the total shocking. It's "It Can't Happen Here" stuff of course, but Mr. Shafer has also succeeded in making it a tale of the degradation and dignity of the human spirit, and it deserves good marks.



—Shreve Ballard.

John Jennings—"neglected era."

To the Rescue of Greece

"Banners Against the Wind," by John Jennings (Little, Brown, 299 pp. \$3.75), is a novel about the Bostonian crusader Samuel Gridley Howe, and his work in behalf of the Greek people and American blind children a little more than a century ago.

By Harrison Smith

THE American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and the conquest of the West have provided themes for an endless stream of novels. The years between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, when the country was not in danger and its peaceful Eastern cities were expanding their trade across the Atlantic, have in comparison been neglected. John Jennings, after a dozen popular historical novels set in the more obvious periods, has ventured into this era with *"Banners Against the Wind,"* a biographical novel about an almost forgotten American hero, Samuel Gridley Howe, the son of a stalwart Boston family. Joseph Howe, his father, was a cautious, conservative merchant whose family rope yard had provided the fighting frigates and clipper ships of New England with their cordage. Sam was an idealist, a tall, handsome, young man who made up his mind that as soon as he had graduated from medical school he would sail to Greece, join Lord Byron, and help to save Hellenic civilization from conquest by the brutal and pagan Turks. As he told his angry father, "Any man who will fight to be free, no matter where he lives, deserves all the help I can give him."

A Boston committee furnished him with medical supplies and a passage to the ravaged Greek port of Navarino on the Ionian Sea. He left behind a beautiful but obstinate young lady whom he was supposed to marry. Indeed, his ardor for Greek emancipation left little room for romance, though Bouboulinas, a ferocious and amorous female bandit, attempted later to seduce him by force, and a voluptuous Turkish slave girl he rescued fell desperately in love with him. To the consternation of his American associates Sam took the slave into his household and might have succumbed to her wiles if the lady bandit had not attacked his refugee settlement and cut the girl's throat.

Aside from his Bostonian regard for male chastity, Sam Howe was every inch a man. He arrived in Greece at a time when the nation was starving and in political and military chaos. He was presumably a man of peace, a physician sent to establish field hospitals and relief centers. When the Turks invaded Southern Greece he fought them and at the same time tried to keep on good terms with the Greek officials and governors who wanted to steal his supplies.

HOWE soon realized that he was confronted with a far greater problem than curing wounded and sick soldiers; he had to save as many of the common people of Greece as he could reach from death by plague and hunger. He was perhaps the first American to conceive of foreign relief on a large scale. When he went back to Boston for the first time he had a plan of which General Marshall would have approved a hundred and ten years later. He wanted to pay thousands of peasants to rebuild their villages and towns and to teach them a modern conception of agriculture. After lecturing through the States to obtain the necessary money and the promise of American ships to carry the quantity of needed supplies, he returned to Greece. The Greeks had found a king and temporarily stable government, and he was given a decoration and the title of chevalier.

Back home in Boston again, he found himself a hero without a cause. Sam was a man who could not live without one. Soon he started the first school in America for blind, deaf, and dumb children. He visited state legislatures with two little girls who had learned to read a raised type he had invented, and again the money flowed in. He was forty years old when three charming young ladies visited his asylum. One of them was Julia Ward. The story of the novel ends with his courtship and marriage, though Samuel and Julia Ward Howe later became ardent and for a time extremely unpopular, emancipationists. His belief that every man should be free had not been weakened by his trials in Greece. The reader of *"Banners Against the Wind"* may regret that Mr. Jennings's story of this remarkable American ends so abruptly.