

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

FIFTEEN MINUTES A DAY

By Charles W. Ferguson

IF Fascism and Sinn Feinism are being discussed, do you have to go all evening without saying a single word? Are you embarrassed and diffident when talk at dinner turns to "Il Duce" and the Machiavellian tergiversations of diplomatists? Do you have to drum with your fork or bite your nails when Italy and Ireland are mentioned, and as you ride home in the limousine does your wife castigate you severely for making a showing less pedantic than other women's husbands? Then I commend to you a one foot bookshelf on these items which will give you all the strength and self assurance of a Ph.D. and solve your social and domestic difficulties. You can talk at length on these matters, or, better still, you can, by mastering this course of reading, turn the conversation into channels where you will have the whole stream to yourself.

The first of the books is "Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland". The two mammoth volumes of this spectacular work are as handsomely bound and boxed as are most of the books that nobody reads. Their shelf appearance is prohibitive. One gets suspicious of their contents. I put them on a table and shied around them for days before I got up courage enough for the task in hand. But, once under way, I found the tale Piaras Beaslai tells as engrossing as a dime novel, yet important and intelligent enough to give me the pleasant feeling that I was becoming more and more cultured as I read. I cannot say

that, once you have begun this work, you will not lay it aside. The very task of holding the thing on your lap precludes that. But I swear that I developed something akin to pleurisy pains before I was willing to change my reading position or come up for nicotine. Then I went under again, totally immersed in a tale which makes "Beau Geste" read like an account of pacifists at tea. The fact that a reviewer reads a book would indicate that the author has said something which should interest all humanity.

Ireland, like last week's murderess, has passed from the headlines in this country. Even Italy is mentioned principally in the magazine section these days. The consequence is that we are now in a position to consider Fascism and the Irish fight for freedom somewhat objectively. Fortunately, however, Beaslai is not objective enough to be dull. From the *coup* of Easter Week, 1916, until the final triumph of the Irish, he was prominently and dangerously identified with the work of the Irish Volunteers. He writes from the inside looking out. He has a tale to tell. He divulges esoteric information not hitherto made public, and I marvel that he had the nerve to publish his book in England as well as in America. What's more, he writes as well as a man has any business writing.

Michael Collins does not monopolize Beaslai's narrative. As a matter of fact, it seemed to me that Collins was more or less adventitious in the first volume. Beaslai is not a biographer and he has more to explain than the part Collins played in upsetting the

inglorious espionage system with which the Motherland kept Ireland in subjection. Collins is often forced into the pages with the author's assurance that he was really a great man, but, until much later events, Collins struck me as something of a nuisance to the story. The dimensions of Beaslai's story simply crowded him out of the first volume. We have such illuminating insights into the man's character as the assertion that he was modest. Or, when he was taken ill, we are told that he got up from his bed with the memorable and singular statement, "The work won't wait for me."

Whatever Beaslai lacks as a biographer he more than compensates for as a narrator. That his work is authoritative is not so important as that it is infallibly interesting. His story has of course far too many ramifications to admit of brief digest here. I can only say that for a tale of blood and thunder it has no equal in my restricted range of reading; I can easily imagine that Lloyd George and Stanley Baldwin will bootleg the thing into their bedchambers and read it after hours. One instance of the author's glibness is worth citing. Collins was witness to insult and torture inflicted by one Captain Wilson upon Irish insurrectionists following Easter Week, 1916; he was himself insulted by this same Wilson. The author remarks in a brief paragraph:

In 1920 Collins discovered that Wilson was a District Inspector of the R. I. C. at Gorey. Shortly afterwards Wilson met with a sudden and violent death.

Of the two books on Fascism, I believe Don Sturzo's discussion of "Italy and Facismo" is measurably the more ambitious and profound. If this statement, however, is to be taken as disparaging "Fascism" by Giuseppe Prezzolini, I withdraw it. Both books are

very informing and, taken together, they give balanced perspective to a movement which has rocked Europe and led to riots in Port Chester, New York, and Newark, New Jersey. Don Sturzo's style weathers translation better, I believe, but he is at times too recondite to serve the purposes of one who wants afterdinner culture. He plants his feet upon the rock of ages when he views Fascism in the light of economic circumstance and interprets its genesis in the light of economic history. His study of antecedents is extremely able; though the reader will grow impatient and cry inwardly, "We want Mussolini!" long before Sturzo is willing to bring him on. The stage is patiently set, then Benito emerges in all his glory and inevitability. As for Don Sturzo's view of Fascism, it is sufficient to say that he is now in exile. Under this circumstance, however, he plays the rôle of impartial critic with a genius and urbanity given to few of God's creatures. After all, he could not be blamed for setting down the obvious cruelties and repressions of a pugilist government, nor for seeing the deleterious results of a Ku Kluxery gone on a rampage.

Prezzolini's book is briefer and simpler. He writes with more detachment, if that be any virtue. His translator, Kathleen Macmillan, contributes a final chapter in which she gives articulation to the author's discussion of principles and adds the events which have occurred since the manuscript was finished. On the whole the book is quite admirable and one, by reading it, could really get by in current conversation without reading the more philosophical effort of Don Sturzo's. As a matter of fact, if I could regard myself as a menace to book sales, I would damn the other two books and commend Prezzolini's to a

loving public. At least its pages are cut.

Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland. By Piaras Beaslai. Two volumes. Harper and Brothers.
Italy and Facismo. By Luigi Sturzo. Harcourt, Brace and Company.
Fascism. By Giuseppe Prezzolini. E. P. Dutton and Company.

SEEING AMERICA WHOLE

By Herschel Brickell

AMERICANS do not have to depend upon foreign sources for their contemporary literature of self examination. The number of critics of present day civilization and culture in the United States is impressive; we suffer from no lack of professional viewers with alarm, even though they be far outnumbered by and far less popular than the equally professional painters with pride.

But the domestic variety of such criticism is likely to lack calmness and perspective. The size of the country demands that it and its multifarious problems be observed from a height and a distance if the observer is to see it whole. This last a Frenchman has done, a Frenchman who is by profession a teacher of economics in Paris, but who knows America from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

André Siegfried has made an invaluable contribution to the study of our civilization, amazing in its clarity, its sense of proportion, its exactness of detail, and its interest. But for the fact that his fine book includes no study of American cultural achievements, it is completely comprehensive, a fair, balanced study of our ethnic situation, our religion, our politics, our prevailing prosperity, and our foreign relations.

Another foreigner who knows his America at first hand has contributed a volume of importance to thinking people, but in a much narrower sense. Norman Angell's book is a study of the public mind, chiefly in England and the United States, half of which is devoted to the imbecility of nations in wartime, which is too obvious to need all this weight of evidence.

Mr. Angell has suffered for his intelligence; has felt the stupidity of the masses as a personal matter both here and in his own country, and this fact appears to throw him off balance. He is at too great pains to prove that the voice of the people is the voice of Satan — in wartime. This is self evident, except that the people are not alone. Their leaders, poets, politicians, publicists, with pathetically few exceptions run with the pack.

These are the steps in his reasoning: First, that the public mind, or intelligence, is for all practical purposes non-existent. Second, that there is no durable substitute for democracy. Third, that careful training of the public conscience — not mere education in the habitual sense — will better conditions in the *faute de mieux* governmental system.

This last is a recognizable variation of the older theory that universal education would serve as a panacea for all the ills of rule by the people, a theory to which Americans cling, although its worthlessness has become painfully obvious. It was based at the outset upon the false premise that all men are created equal in mental and ethical capacity, and only need training to become perfect units in a perfect polity.

M. Siegfried portrays a grown up America as a collection of more or less inimical racial units; by no means fused as yet into a nation — this situ-