

of New England, have touched her work with penury and chill. She wants to speak out and to let her people speak out. But neither she nor they can conquer a sense that free and intimate and vigorous expression is a little shameless. To uncover one's soul seems almost like uncovering one's body. Behind Miss Glaspell's hardihood of thought hover the fear and self-torment of the Puritan. She is a modern radical and a New England school teacher; she is a woman of intrepid thought and also the cramped and aproned wife on some Iowa farm. She is a composite, and that composite is intensely American. She is never quite spontaneous and unconscious and free, never the unquestioning servant of her art. She broods and tortures herself and weighs the issues of expression.

If this view of Miss Glaspell's literary character is correct, it may seem strange upon superficial consideration that four of her seven one-act plays are comedies. But two of them, the rather trivial "Suppressed Desires" and the quite brilliant "Tickless Time," were written in collaboration with George Cram Cook, a far less scrupulous and more ungirdled mind. Her comedy, furthermore, is never hearty. It is not the comedy of character but of ideas, or, rather, of the confusion or falseness or absurdity of ideas. "Woman's Honor" is the best example of her art in this mood. By a sound and strictly dramatic if somewhat too geometrical device, Miss Glaspell dramatizes a very searching ironic idea: a man who refuses to establish an alibi in order to save a woman's honor dies to prove her possessed of what he himself has taken and risks everything to demonstrate the existence of what has ceased to be. The one-act tragedies are more characteristic of her; they cleave deep, but they also illustrate what one might almost call her taciturnity. That is the fault of her best-known piece, "Trifles." The theme is magnificent; it is inherently and intensely dramatic, since its very nature is culmination and crisis. But the actual speech of the plan is neither sufficient nor sufficiently direct. Somewhere in every drama words must ring out. They need not ring like trumpets. The ring need not be loud, but it must be clear. Suppose in "Trifles" you do not, on the stage, catch the precise significance of the glances which the neighbor women exchange. There need have been no set speech, no false eloquence, no heightening of what these very women might easily have said in their own persons. But one aches for a word to release the dumbness, complete the crisis, and drive the tragic situation home.

The same criticism may be made, though in a lesser degree, of Miss Glaspell's single full-length play, "Bernice." No production would be just to the very high merits of that piece which did not add several speeches to the first and third acts and give these the spiritual and dramatic clearness which the second already has. Crude people will call the play "talky." But indeed there is not quite talk enough. Nor does Miss Glaspell deal here with simple and stifled souls. That objection is the only one to be made. The modern American drama has nothing better to show than Miss Glaspell's portrait of the "glib and empty" writer whose skill was "a mask for his lack of power" and whose wife sought, even as she died, to lend him that power through the sudden impact of a supremely tragic reality. The surface of the play is delicate and hushed. But beneath the surface is the intense struggle of rending forces. Bernice is dead. The soft radiance of her spirit is still upon the house. It is still reflected in her father's ways and words. Her husband and her friend hasten to that house. And now the drama sets in, the drama that grows from Bernice's last words to her old servant. It is a dramatic action that moves and stirs and transforms. There is hardly the waving of a curtain in those quiet rooms. Yet the dying woman's words are seen to have been a creative and dramatic act. Through a bright, hard window one watches people in a house of mourning. They stand or sit and talk haltingly as people do at such times. Nothing is done. Yet everything happens—death and life and a new birth. What more can drama give?

LUDWIG LEWISOHN

An Elder America

The Age of Innocence. By Edith Wharton. D. Appleton and Company.

The Vacation of the Kelwyns. By William Dean Howells. Harper and Brothers.

WE can no more do without some notion or other of an age more golden than our own than we can do without bread. There must be, we assure ourselves, a more delectable day yet to come, or there must have been one once. The evidence of prophecy, however, is stronger than that of history, which, somehow, fails to find the perfect age. Mrs. Wharton has never ranged herself with the prophets, contented, apparently, with being the most intellectual of our novelists and surveying with level, satirical eyes the very visible world. By the "Age of Innocence" she means the seventies in New York during the past century; and the innocence she finds there is "the innocence that seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience." To the hotter attacks which angrier critics have recently been making upon that age she does not lend herself. Her language is cool and suave. And yet the effect of her picture is an unsparing accusation of that genteel decade when the van der Luydens of Skuytercliff were the ultimate arbiters of "form" in Manhattan, and "form" was occupation and religion for the little aristocracy which still held its tight fortress in the shaggy city so soon about to overwhelm it. The imminence of the rising tide is never quite indicated. How could it be, when the characters of the action themselves do not see it, bound up as they are with walking their wintry paths and hugging their iron taboos? Newland Archer suspects a change, but that is because he is a victim of the tribal order which sentences him to a life without passion, without expression, without satisfaction. The Countess Olenska suspects it, but she too is a victim, too fine for the rougher give-and-take of her husband's careless European society and yet not conventional enough for the dull routine which in her native New York covers the fineness to which also she is native. The peculiar tragedy of their sacrifice is that it is for the sake of a person, Archer's wife, who is virtuous because she is incapable of temptation, competent because she is incapable of any deep perturbation, and willing to suit herself to the least decorum of their world because she is incapable of understanding that there is anywhere anything larger or freer. The unimaginative not only miss the flower of life themselves but they shut others from it as well.

Mrs. Wharton's structure and methods show no influence of the impressionism now broadening the channel of fiction; she does not avoid one or two touches of the florid in her impassioned scenes; she rounds out her story with a reminiscent chapter which forces in the note of elegy where it only partially belongs. But "The Age of Innocence" is a masterly achievement. In lonely contrast to almost all the novelists who write about fashionable New York, she knows her world. In lonely contrast to the many who write about what they know without understanding it or interpreting it, she brings a superbly critical disposition to arrange her knowledge in significant forms. These characters who move with such precision and veracity through the ritual of a frozen caste are here as real as their actual lives would ever have let them be. They are stiff with ceremonial garments and heavy with the weight of imagined responsibilities. Mrs. Wharton's triumph is that she has described these rites and surfaces and burdens as familiarly as if she loved them and as lucidly as if she hated them.

"The Vacation of the Kelwyns," a novel written by William Dean Howells about 1910 but for unannounced reasons not then published, also turns back to the idyllic seventies, when Professor Kelwyn and his family went from a New England college to spend the summer in a house rented by them from a Shaker community and run for them by a pair of rustics so

impossible in customs and manners that they have to be discharged. To the task of discharging them the Kelwyns's entire vacation is devoted. About this trivial theme play all the warmth and grace and gentleness which marked the later Howells. But here is more than farce and timid hesitancy: here is a document upon that pastoral age. Genteel New England, no less than genteel New York, stood on precarious foundations. Democracy menaced it. In a thoroughly aristocratic society the impossible Kites could have been discharged in a sentence; in a thoroughly democratic society there could have been some meeting of the different minds, and a mutual adjustment. In the half-and-half society of the seventies there was nothing to do but twist and turn and hint and hope.

C. V. D.

Books in Brief

H. DENNIS BRADLEY'S "Not For Fools" (London: Grant Richards) began as a series of newspaper articles written during the war. Mr. Bradley is a business man in London whose business was decided to be essential, and so he was not called upon for military service. Instead of greeting this immunity with grateful silence he made it an opportunity to attack the government with great vigor, and particularly those departments having to do with expenditures and propaganda. At first no newspaper would print his denunciations, and he had to insert them as paid advertisements, but after awhile he became a welcome contributor to many journals and gathered a large following. Of course it is not news today that money was wasted idiotically during the war, and that free speech was abrogated, and that the old men who could not fight were a great deal more eager for the slaughter than the young men who could and had to. But when Mr. Bradley first enunciated these propositions they were less obvious and a good deal more shocking. Unluckily, his genuine success as a critic of official stupidity and dishonesty filled him with a considerable admiration for himself as a brilliant and unfettered thinker, and so he embellishes his war papers with specimens of his ratiocination in other fields. A specimen epigram: "My only objection to business is that it interferes with pleasure." Another: "The average musical comedy is an unmusical tragedy of stupidity and cupidity." The book, rather oddly, is illustrated with excellent designs in color by Rilette and Jacques D'Or.

A MASS of useful data for the student of Italian literature or the lover of the drama is collected between the covers of "Goldoni and the Venice of his Time" (Macmillan), by Joseph Spencer Kennard. After briefly sketching the history of Italian comedy before Goldoni and tracing to their probable origins the characters and masks of his plays, the author takes up the life of the playwright; then, in the final half of the study, the comedies are discussed and the evolution of plots and characters set forth; until the reader comes to realize how Goldoni gathered the threads of the past, the golden thread of classical comedy and the coarser homespun of the commedia dell' arte, in order to mingle them and prepare the woof for modern comedy. It is a painstaking, if somewhat loosely discursive production, documented with footnotes and a bibliography which is the best evidence of the attraction scholars everywhere have felt toward the amiable Carlo; grouped around his portrait the author has placed the portraits of all his friends and foes. Of course, some of this discursiveness was needed to correct the Memoirs, written, like Goldoni's letters and prefaces, with all the actor's regard to his audience, and present to us the real Goldoni in his prosaic but lovable simplicity. Certainly, to know the playwright through his biography and his comedies is to know Goldoni's Venice, for rarely if ever has an author so clearly mirrored in deeds and works the thought, the atmosphere, the very soul of his environment.

BRENTANO'S

Retail Book Department

Fifth Avenue and 27th Street, New York City
BOOKS ON PRESENT DAY TOPICS

Problems of Today

By Moorfield Storey

\$1.50

In this timely book, Mr. Storey brings his long experience with affairs and keen analytic mind to the study of such pressing topics as the Use of Parties, Lawlessness, Racial Prejudices, the Labor Question, and Our Foreign Relations. He writes always with penetration, lucidity, and a wealth of illustration, and from a point of view at once progressive and well balanced.

Chaos and Order in Industry

By G. D. H. Cole

\$2.75

Mr. Cole does not pretend that industry is a problem that can be isolated from the whole question of social structure. In so far as he has so treated it it has been purely for the purpose of stimulating discussion. The book as a whole is constructive and points the way to what the author considers a far better and more efficient social and industrial system.

Labor's Crisis: An Employer's View of Labor Problems

By Sigmund Mendelsohn

\$1.50

The question of labor reform is taken up by this employer from the employer's point of view. He analyzes labor's propositions to remedy the existing unrest, argues that the labor scarcity is not entirely due to decrease in the number of laborers, and suggests many effects of the unrest itself on production and on labor. It is a thoughtful study by a keen, open-minded employer, contributing to one of the most important discussions of the day.

A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain

By Sidney and Beatrice Webb

\$4.25

What is here presented is more than a Constitution (though as a practicable and characteristically British scheme for Parliamentary and Local Government reform it may receive the attention of statesmen and students). It is more even than a fully worked-out plan for Nationalization and Municipalization, with "workers' control." With its proposals for the development of the Cooperative Movement, for the reorganization of the Vocational World, and for the coordination of all factors, from the Crown to the Works Committee, it sets forth a complete Socialist Commonwealth.

The New World

By Frank Comerford

\$2.00

Frank Comerford made a searching study of unrest in Europe from Ireland to the Bolshevik Front. Upon his return he was special prosecutor for the State of Illinois in the celebrated Red cases in which twenty men were found guilty of conspiring to overthrow the Government and sentenced to the penitentiary. Mr. Comerford trailed unrest in Europe and America and literally interviewed the specter which is menacingly hanging over the world. He has given voice to the mass mind of a brooding world. It is a great human document, in which the truth thrills the reader.

Postage Additional



BRENTANO'S

Retail Book Department

Fifth Avenue and 27th Street
New York City