

Speaking of Books

A New Literary Department

Edited by FRANCES LAMONT ROBBINS

Who Cares?

TO and fro, between the marshaled forces of book reviews and publishers' blurbs in battle array, with the petty tumult of nursery warfare, goes the quarrel about the authenticity of *Trader Horn*. Is he real or did Mrs. Ethelreda Lewis make him up? His picture appeared in the Sunday paper, but any old man with a beard might have been induced to sit for that for a bit of the royalties. Galsworthy called on him in South Africa; but Galsworthy is a novelist, and knows what really matters. Who cares? Who cares whether an old English sailor become a peddler of trivets and teakettles did wander up to the back door of a house and fill the eager ears of a lady who has done some writing before now with a story out of the golden book of romance, or whether the lady, who has made up people out of her head before, made up this particular one, and made him the sort of person that Americans like to read about? Probably *Trader Horn* is real and Mrs. Lewis is gifted. At any rate, they have, between them, produced a book which is deservedly popular.

In the tranquil blue eyes of old men whose lives have been spent in lonely and majestic places—the sea, the windy plains, the mountains—there is a look which is the envy and despair of city dwellers.

Americans are city people, wherever they live. The spirit of their adventuring forefathers is spent; all of it exhausted in one great and gallant effort. Adventure lingers in their dreams, their wistful heritage. Is it surprising that they turn to books like "*Trader Horn*" for the escape by daylight which comes to them at night, and which they long for whose dreams are childlike and whose days are lonely?

For "*Trader Horn*" holds all the courage in the face of all the danger that they could ask. It is rich with the color of the sea, and of the forest, of naked savages and bedizened roughs. It is bright with terrible and relentless life. It holds all glamorous romance in the span of one life. And there is truth in it; children's truth; truth which the grown man who lives in cities has for-

gotten, which he will scorn when he lays down the book and turns back to work. But it is truth that he remembers in his dreams.

What They Are Reading

THE FOLLOWING LIST OF BEST-SELLING BOOKS is compiled from lists sent us by telegram on Saturday by the following book-shops: Brentanos, New York; Old Corner Book Store, Boston; Scrantoms Inc., Rochester; Korner & Wood, Cleveland; Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney, St. Louis; Kendrick Bellamy Company, Denver; Teolin Pilot Company, Houston; Paul Elder & Co., San Francisco. We asked these stores to co-operate with us each week because we believe that they are representative of the taste of the more intelligent readers in their communities. The books which are most in demand in these shops are usually those which are most discussed. We believe that they are the books which Outlook readers will want to know more about.

Fiction

KITTY. By Warwick Deeping. A. A. Knopf.

If you like a machine-made story, animated by living people and touched by plenty of "wholesome" sentiment, you will enjoy this typical Deeping story of post-war England.

JALNA. By Mazo de la Roche. Little, Brown & Co.

If setting which is novel and pleasing, caricature which is brilliant, and story which is commonplace compensate you for flat and lifeless character drawing, you will enjoy this book, which won the "Atlantic Monthly" prize. It was reviewed at length in the issue of November 2.

DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP. By Willa Cather. A. A. Knopf.

This biography in fiction form has a beauty which holds life in suspension and creates a moving atmosphere. Any reader who appreciates fine prose style, rich coloring, and rounded characters will find this book delightful. Reviewed at length in issue of October 26.

DUSTY ANSWER. By Rosamund Lehmann. Henry Holt & Co.

If your interest can be held by a long and humorless picture of the fluttering

emotions of a section of present-day adolescence bound together by a fine poetic talent, you will like this. And you will want to read it if you are interested in young writers very gifted and worth watching.

RED SKY AT MORNING. By Margaret Kennedy. Doubleday, Page & Co.

Those who read and rejoiced in "*The Constant Nymph*" will want to read this new novel by the same author. The settings and characters are somewhat similar, but Margaret Kennedy understands them, and again makes them vivid and enthralling. As in the first book, the children in "*Red Sky*" are particularly delightful. Though the effect of these very similarities is to make this book seem less of an achievement than the other, it is decidedly worth reading.

Non-Fiction

TRADER HORN. By Alfred Aloysius Horn and Ethelreda Lewis. Simon & Schuster.

Reviewed in this issue.

MOTHER INDIA. By Katherine Mayo. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

In view of the wide circulation in America of this admirable piece of partisan reporting, it is a pity that the comments upon it by Mukerji, Gandhi, and some English reviewers cannot be also read. It is this reviewer's opinion that not more than one in ten of the people who read this book are interested in knowing anything about India; and it seems likely that it will undo much of the work that has been done toward creating sympathy between this country and that.

NAPOLEON. By Emil Ludwig. Boni & Liveright (erroneously attributed in last week's issue to Little, Brown & Co.).

You will find the reading of this fine biography a rewarding experience. It was reviewed at length in last week's issue.

BISMARCK. By Emil Ludwig. Little, Brown & Co.

In those who will read it as history the book presupposes more knowledge of Bismarck's Germany than most

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Americans have. But as the biography of a great genius it is a book which any one can read with eager interest. It was reviewed in last week's issue.

NOW WE ARE SIX. By A. A. Milne.
E. P. Dutton & Co.

Christopher Robin's talent as a poet again makes him, what older poets rarely are, a best-seller. If your household needs enlivening or pulling together, you can do no better than by taking home a copy of this book.

The Inevitable Leeway

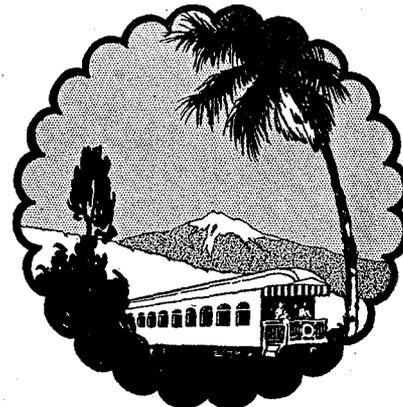
The Runner's Thoreau

THE HEART OF THOREAU'S JOURNALS. Edited by Odell Shepard. Houghton Mifflin Company.

To read Thoreau has seemed to many not precious even, but pedantic. He has figured in many minds as a naturalist whose writings could interest only such individuals as might be expected to pursue birds in the spring with opera-glasses or to go out botanizing. Or he has been accepted as the preacher of a loose and lazy back-to-nature doctrine, ridiculous in conscientious 1850, and much more so in constructive 1927. By coming across a chance quotation only did the general reader discover him to be a man thinking, whose thoughts were comprehensible and decidedly shareable. And so appreciation of this man whose contribution to American letters is of the greatest, whose interest for Americans is general, and whose gifts lie easily within the range of ordinary readers' tastes, has been left almost wholly to the scholarly.

It is a pity, because to read "Walden," the best-known and the most readily available of Thoreau's books, is a delightful and enriching experience for any one. Thoreau's sentiments and thoughts are those which, as he says, "visit all men more or less generally." He "recalled them from oblivion and fixed" them, not only for himself, but for any one who has felt their light footsteps in his mind and tried vainly to catch them. He set them down in a form which since Poor Richard's time has been agreeable to Americans. "Walden" and "The Week" are collections of apothegms, bright stones of thought, not particularly improved by having been set into a pattern. Most of the material in "Walden" and "The Week" was taken by Thoreau from his journals. He was primarily an observer and a journalist, and he set down in his journals his daily impressions during twenty-four years. The journals are not convenient of access to the average reader. For

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one thing, they fill fourteen large volumes. For another, the reader must do his own sorting of their contents, must wade through an occasional morass of dullness, must sometimes extricate the naturalist from the philosopher's toils and *vice versa*. In the interests of this average reader, Odell Shepard has made a fine selection from the journals and produced a book which could with pleasure and profit be put into every American's library.

With pleasure first; because Thoreau undoubtedly wrote for the purpose of giving it. He seems to this reviewer to have had no impulse to preach or lead. He was a mystic by nature, an ascetic in his own life, and such is not the material from which preachers are made. He hoped, if anything, to show the beauty of simple pleasures. A man who wrote, "One grain of realization, of instant life, on which we stand, is equivalent to acres of the leaf of hope ham-

mered out to gild our prospect," would have wished that his work, if it were read at all, be read for delight. He was wholly human, and never sentimental, although he could write of sentimental things. He wrote with equal richness and real humor of a marooned kitten signaling to a passing boat for rescue and embarrassing its rescuers, and of Mrs. S., lecturing on womanhood, and showing herself in an interview after the lecture to be "a woman in the too common sense, after all," in talking with whom "you had to substitute courtesy for sense and argument." His style may

be sententious at times, but he handles words with charm and skill. He can be read always with pleasure.

THE editor of this department will be glad to help readers with advice and suggestions in buying current books, whether noticed on this page or not. If you wish guidance in selecting books for yourself or to give away, we shall do the best we can for you if you will write us, giving some suggestions, preferably with examples, of the taste which is to be satisfied. We shall confine ourselves to books published within the last year or so, so that you will have no trouble in buying them through your own bookshop.

Concerning an American Industry

(Continued from page 347)

and mechanized tale and give the reader a sense of immediacy to reality, to the way real men and women meet their difficulties and achieve their ambitions.

When, by the way, will we see that fiction can be truer than life itself? That the artist, as creator and omniscient observer, can give us a fuller, rounder view of his people than we can ever hope to have of our most intimate associates?

William Dean Howells once pondered the American short story and asked three questions:

"Is it because American life is scrappy and desultory and instinctively seeks its expression in the sketch, the little tale, the miniature romance; or because the short story seems in all literature to find its development earlier than the full-sized novel? Did our skill in writing short stories create the demand for them in the magazines, or did the demand of the magazines foster the special skill?"

Mr. Howells did not attempt to answer his questions. Perhaps it was wiser at the time merely to pose them, hoping that they would set minds to thinking of the novel, which he considered the proper medium for men of letters.

The last question seems to belong with the riddle of the hen and the egg. Any schoolboy can answer the second. In the first there is meat as fresh as the day Mr. Howells propounded it.

The most ardent patriot would hardly deny that American life has been chaotic. More than that, the task of subduing a continent has absorbed the energies of men who, in a more settled state, would rather write history than make it. The experiment in democracy became a conquest by industry; and its glorification stifled talent and maimed genius, as Van Wyck Brooks has pointed out in "The Ordeal of Mark Twain."

Life in America has been exciting, it has had grand moments; but it has also been incalculable. And the first-rate artist, contrary to opinion, does not go about his business without calculating tendencies; indeed, he is acutely sensitive to them. For work on a great scale, for the novels that are the chief glory of a nation's literature, he must have a conviction of national direction, of unity in the largest sense. He must feel these things if only to oppose them.

It is not without significance that such writers as James Boyd and Joseph Hergeheimer, whose tempers are orderly and aristocratic, should go back to colonial days for their materials. It is not entirely for the specious pleasures of Montmartre that so many of our younger men are looking at America from France. It is that they may sort out their "scrappy" impressions away from the compulsion to be up and at it, to sell a bill of goods, to make Hokumville bigger, better, and brighter. It is to such detachment that we owe such a fine American novel as Glenway Wescott's "The Grandmothers."

If we are not precisely sure where we are going, nor whether we are going together, we have at least entered an age of caution. Else why is Mr. Coolidge the favorite of men? The worst of chaos has passed; and out of it has come the railroad, the telephone, the radio, the instruments by which our spiritual unity can be achieved. It will not hurt us to be a little standardized there, if our spiritual leaders are all right.

The writer believes that the change is already reflected in the publishers' lists. We are not getting great novels, but we are getting good ones; many more than Mr. Howells could see in his day. Let us look to them and to their authors, and not to be too much alarmed for the future of our literature.

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By the Way

AN Italian fruit merchant in New York City has been much annoyed by customers pinching his apples, pears, and peaches in order to see if they were ripe enough to eat. So he tacked up this sign: "If You Must Pincha Da Fruit, Pincha Da Cocomanut."

An advertisement in a theatrical weekly reads:

WANTED

Man who stays under water for 30 minutes in a sealed box. Box No. 581, The Billboard, 1560 Broadway, New York City.

One of the best places the New York police have for picking up escaped criminals and those wanted by the police in other cities is said to be the north side of the Times Building on Times Square. It is here that "all the home town papers" are sold.

A Sunday-school teacher was telling her class all about the missionaries who went out to foreign lands to convert the cannibals. "What do you think would be the first thing the missionaries should teach these cannibals?" asked the teacher. One bright little boy answered readily, "I know. They should teach them to be vegetarians."

THE most famous of Bostonian town criers was "Old Wilson," 1808-41, who had a rude popular wit, common, we are told, to the profession. When announcing the Fourth of July dinner in Charlestown, certain denizens of that ancient place pestered him with inquiries as to the bill of fare, and elicited the reply that the dinner would be ample, with a pig at every plate. Another crier, according to the New York "Times," was Charles H. Chase, of Nantucket. Accosted by a jocosely young lady, who inquired where he had obtained his bell, he replied, with a polite bow: "I obtained my bell, young woman, at the same place where you got your manners—the brass factory."

A Scotchman applied for a position as a patrolman on the London police force. Scotland Yard asked him this question: "Suppose, McFarland, you saw a crowd congregated at a certain point on your beat, how would you disperse it quickly, with the least trouble?" "I would pass the hat," answered McFarland.

"Ain't it grand," writes Abe Martin, "to wake up Monday mornin' an' find the family intact?"

Now that Roxy has called his new cinema theatre "The Cathedral of the Motion Picture," a Bronx, New York, theatre owner is founding a "Synagogue of the Movies."

The following classified advertisement under the heading "Situations Wanted" recently appeared in the New York "Evening Telegram:"

"COLORED girl requires cleaning, 9 to 1 morning. Phone — 2285."

IT has been figured out by "Capper's Weekly" that the number of public officers on city, county, State, and Federal pay-rolls has increased sixty per cent in the last twelve years. "If everybody should work for the Government, would the country starve?" the paper asks, and answers: "No. Because in that case the Government would be running the farms as well as the machine shops, and also paying the salaries of the lawyers, doctors, teachers, and even editors."

Mrs. Petunia Riggs, says "Life," has at last located the squeak in the rear of her car which has been bothering her for the past few days. It was her husband requesting from the back seat that she drive a little slower.

From "Punch:"

She: "You might get the afternoon off and come with us. Ask leave to attend your grandfather's funeral."

He: "Not me. I'm not that sort of rotter. Besides, I'm in my grandfather's office."

An advertisement clipped from an Alabama paper: "Comfortable five-room cottage with bath occupied by owner."

From "Life:"

First newspaper headline writer: "Give me a synonym for 'finny tribe.'"

Second headline writer: "How about 'fish?'"

First headline writer: "Fine! I never thought of that."

Can you rearrange the following letters to make entirely different words? Each unit in this paragraph contains all the letters necessary to make a new word.

The red an, Cart horse, Rateably, Chesty, Tired crag, Reinmode, Flog water, Munuta, Talponceau, Nice mauls, Ocatapegs, Bryan hilt, Nathan sure, Drop a cub, Meat drill, Dewy danse.

Answer next week.



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