

IN THE BOOKMAN'S MAIL

DEAR MR. FARRAR:
"Why Anthologies?" in the leading article, "The Point of View", in last December's BOOKMAN, containing a selection from a letter written by Edna Ferber to the "Authors' League Bulletin", is so sharp that it starts a long train of thought. Says Miss Ferber:

I work weeks, and sometimes months, on a short story. Sometimes the idea for a short story is carried around by me for years before I feel that it is sufficiently developed to take the written form. Why should — take this story which I sweat blood to write and reap the benefit of its book publication? If he is going to continue to publish an annual book of short stories written by others, he should be made to share his profits equally among the writers contributing to his book. . . . I think the whole symposium and anthology practice is bunk. It is on the increase. It should be stopped.

I am not defending the compiler of short stories. I believe Miss Ferber is *partially* right, at least from the commercial standpoint. I am not a reader of short stories, agreeing with Samuel McChord Crothers that "the short story is invented for people who want a literary quick lunch". I am not a writer — cannot write a poem, an essay or a story. I am a reader, pure and simple. When I take into my hand a book to read my first impulse is a caress, because I love a book, its paper, cover, the printer's ink and all. Then I turn to the preface, if it contains one. Often I find there some gem of thought worth preserving. That gives me the key to the book, where I feel sure there are more gems awaiting me. I am rarely disappointed. These I call my thought breeders. As a booklover I emphatically echo the thought expressed by Christopher Morley in his "Pipefuls":

There is no mistaking a real book when one meets it. It is like falling in love, and like that colossal adventure it is an experience of great social import. Even as the tranced swain, the booklover yearns to tell others of his bliss. He writes letters about it, adds it to the postscript of all manner of communications, intrudes it into telephone messages, and insists on his friends writing down the title of the find. Like the simple-hearted betrothed, once certain of his conquest, "I want you to love her, too!"

Take the viewpoint of a compiler: He pays his two dollars for a book and absorbs it. It becomes his. It has gone out of the hands of the author into the hands of the reader — without whom the book would be useless! He finds fresh thought in that book and jots it down for future study. Such thought broadens one, gives depth to character. As he continues reading he

accumulates these valuable selections — the very epitome of the author's thought life; and in time finds that he has the "makings" of many volumes of quotations. Shall he keep these to himself, giving perhaps occasionally to friends who chance to know of his rich stores? Perhaps a demand comes from others who have little time to read — cannot hope to read the full works of these great master minds. His longing is always to share this beauty with all who need it — and the world does need all the beauty it can get.

I have always been a compiler of quotations, and have been importuned by educators, students, clergymen, public speakers, public men and women everywhere, to make accessible to the general reader these treasuries of thought. Are books of quotations to be included in Miss Ferber's "bunk"? If so I am wrong in trying to help humanity to find beauty in the works of great writers, including those of Miss Ferber herself.

There is something to be said for the anthologist. Think what the world readers would miss without William Stanley Braithwaite's annual "Anthology of Magazine Verse" or Marguerite Wilkinson's book "New Voices", with their exquisite prefaces and bits of interpretation adding beauty to poetry.

It takes two to make a book: its writer and its reader. As Gerald Stanley Lee says in his "The Lost Art of Reading" (page 121):

The orator and the listener, the writer and the reader, in proportion as they become alive to one another, come into the same spirit — the spirit of mutual listening and utterance. At the very best, and in the most inspired mood, the reader reads as if he were a reader and writer both, and the writer writes as if he were a writer and reader both.

If the prime object of the writer is money — royalties — his book is short lived, isn't it? But if he has a message, irrespective of money, then his is a true book and it belongs to us all! The reader appropriates its message and passes it on to others. Henry Seidel Canby, in his Second Series of "Definitions" (page 188), makes clear this relationship between writing and reading:

Too much is said about writing, and not enough of reading. It would seem that whereas only a few can write well and those only when they are prodded until their brains turn over at the proper speed, anyone who can spell can read. Not at all. There are 10,000 bad readers for every bad author, and if the number of good readers in proportion to the good writers proves to be as much as 500 to one the Authors' League should give

public thanks, for the right kind of reader enters sympathetically into the very purpose of the book he possesses, shares its emotions, and plucks out its thoughts. He is rare.

EMMA ERWIN COOLEY.

DEAR SIR:

I tried to publish a newspaper in my home town but I was unable to get the people interested enough to advertise and therefore could not get the money needed to start the enterprise. So, this is what I did:

First, I secured a wooden picture frame in which I placed a cardboard that was large enough for 12 regular typewriting sheets (3 across and 4 down). The news and the editorials were then typewritten on these sheets which were after pasted on the cardboard.

This "framed up" newspaper I hung up on a pole in front of the local post office. While waiting for their mail, the townspeople gathered before the pole and read the paper. Twice a week I placed in the frame a new cardboard with new news. At first I also placed a glass in the frame to protect the news from the winds; but that proved too great a temptation for the town kids. They would have no news under cover! So, believing that the boys' will was more determined than the winds' will, I removed the glass.

But, when I began to "expose things", the "old folks" took to throwing stones. Everything went well for a while: I launched many daring and futile campaigns for better curbs, paved streets, a library and scholarships, etc. Then, *one day*, I read Edgar Lee Masters's "Spoon River". The next day my "news poster" was devoted entirely to a writeup entitled "Local Characters Caricatured". — Yes — that was the end! I am now safely 150 miles away from that town and am looking for a job. Can you help me?

NORMAN ROBANE.

(I am 21 years old.)

MY DEAR MR. FARRAR:

Would Mr. McFee's Doctor (see "The Lady and the Carpet" — March BOOKMAN), if he saw me reading THE BOOKMAN on the deck of his steamer, decide that I was consciously "acquiring culture"; "seeking self expression"; "improving" myself, "dramatizing" my "personality", being a "highbrow female" or merely another one of those "intense spinsters"? Do you suppose the thought would occur that I (heaven forbid!) was reading it, as usual, just because I enjoy

doing so and regardless of any "emotional influence" I might be exerting? May I repeat the question of the junior clerk, with a slight variation: "The doctor may think all those things, but, tell me, why should he write it down?"

ONE OF US WOMEN.

MY DEAR MR. FARRAR:

Is there any one thing in the writing world more difficult to achieve than a four-square biography?

I found Mr. Steuart's "Robert Louis Stevenson" very easy reading, but throughout the two volumes I was conscious of a loss — an intangible something that summed itself up in the feeling that a true biographer has need of a boundless affection for his subject and a rare talent for creating a bond of understanding between the reader and himself. Such a compelling combination will enable them to stand loyally by a mutual friend while dissecting his life in order to make it whole.

I do not doubt Mr. Steuart's sincerity, but his method of presentation of his material seems to me to lack the power to express the deep feeling that should sponsor it. It is difficult to understand why such stress is placed on writing, as a piece of new knowledge (for the general public), that Stevenson was not an example to be emulated in every way by young men. The average person, who has read Stevenson's non-fiction, has never felt that he was a model or that R. L. S., himself, wished to create such an erroneous impression.

Mr. Steuart's greatest fault is a lack of proportion, as in his conception of Stevenson's mother. It seems to me a lamentable error to convey the impression that the relationship between mother and son was one of close companionship. Who is there who doesn't wish it were true? But, with next to no evidence, false chivalry toward the mother is injustice to the son. Had Stevenson been blessed with such helpful mother-understanding, what a different life in some ways his might have been. I recall from memory a letter to Mrs. Sitwell in which R. L. S. wrote that a child of lovers was an orphan — surely a cry from a lonely heart.

Persons who have never read Stevenson will, doubtless, find Mr. Steuart's biography of interest; that larger body of appreciators who have read everything available concerning R. L. S. will find a few new items; but up to date, the true Stevenson with all his faults and vibrant charm is to be found in his own Letters, Verses and Essays.

Sincerely,

E. F. JOHNSON.

DEAR MR. FARRAR:

As a technician would put it, "What motivating influence makes us buy a book?" THE BOOKMAN puts the question editorially, "How Sell, Why Buy?" As one engaged in the "literature of commerce", advertising, or as some wit put it, "that other field of fiction", I interrupt the day's dull drudgery at the desk's dry wood to mount my hobby in reply.

We read books either because they bring into our lives emotions, sensations, or qualities with which we would have had kind Providence endow us more liberally, or because we live vicariously in them the kind of life which circumstance, environment, conscience, physique, or chronology denies us. We buy books because, by the act of possessing, we make more wholly our own the cherished qualities which the book crystallizes for us, or the facts it brings to us.

An advertisement for a new book by a new author need be no less successful than one which features a writer of fame already established. Books are bought for their context. A writer's name may be used to add lustre to the context appeal. But it's not nearly so much a question of "What's Hergesheimer's or Rinehart's latest", as it is this: what's a good mystery story, detective story, romance, historical novel, western story? What's a good work on political economy, biology, radio, biography? How you answer these questions with advertising is more important than flocking big names to your bindings.

Sampling is one of the most potent forms of getting a product across. For many commercial articles, this form of advertising is too expensive. I don't think Charles Schwab has yet found it feasible to give a Southern American country a sample battleship with the hope that it will produce an order for a fleet. But, as John B. Stetson Company brought out in one of the most effective sales aids ever printed, "Getting your product into the prospect's hand is a large part of 'Making Headway Selling Hats'." The same is not only true of books, but a thousand per cent simplified in selling books.

You can give a sample of the context of

a book in an advertisement. Better still, you can often dramatize the sample you select with an illustration. One of the biggest shortcomings of today's book advertising is the lack of dramatization, either in words or with art.

The major appeal in selling a book is emotional. A favorite ingredient of the commercial advertising writer's copy is so called "reason why" text matter. In most of the books to be sold, the appeal is not to the intellect or the reasoning powers but to the emotions. *Visualize* and *dramatize* — these should be the guiding shibboleths of the book publisher's "ad"-ept.

Picture a thrilling situation, hairbreadth escape, tense moment, a climax typical of the character of reading the book promises to deliver. Quote the suitable passage descriptive of the illustration, as your headline. Build up on the appeal of incident or plot in your advertisement context, whet appetite with a taste of terror intensified, clinch action with urge.

That's one way to do it. But how to dramatize biography, political economy, poetry, biology? Let us suppose the biography is of Napoleon. How many people know that had Napoleon not refused Fulton's offer of his steamboat invention, he might have successfully crossed the Channel and invaded England? That suggests new information and new angles on Napoleon. Lead off your ad with it, then. Political economy? How many people know that an early plan in this country's history was to make George Washington King of America, and that he not only refused but broke and disgraced the man who had the movement under way? Suppose a book promises such unusual revelations of blocs, subtle movements and bureaucracy as this — have you not dramatized its appeal? Any subject lends itself to this method of exploitation. At the same time, the advertisement itself takes on the aspect of informative literature. It does not set up the reader resistance to claims made and the atmosphere of selfishness which are usual factors in commercial advertising.

F. ROMER,
President, Samson Service.

THE GOSSIP SHOP

TWO American poets within a month reached the age of fifty: Percy MacKaye and Robert Frost. Both, curiously enough, have at one time or another taken New Hampshire as their home. Both have studied mountain peoples as a basis for some of their work, Mr. MacKaye in Kentucky, Mr. Frost in Vermont and New Hampshire. Here are two men who have had a notable influence in American letters, as their friends and admirers told them at various dinners given to celebrate their half century of attainment. Mr. MacKaye has done much for amateur theatricals by his great interest in the little theatre movement, and his connection with pageantry. The pageants that have swept over New England have actually been of considerable service, not only as artistic expressions of community life but as developing influences toward real community feeling. His "The Scarecrow" and "The Canterbury Pilgrims" were fine pieces of work; likewise, in the opinion of many people, "This Fine-Pretty World", produced by the Neighborhood Playhouse last season. He is planning now to write much more of the Kentucky peoples he has studied so assiduously. A poet of distinction and a propagandist for art and beauty is Mr. MacKaye. Robert Frost has led a far less active life. He has farmed and dreamed and indulged his desire to be a fine teacher. Slowly, the public and the critics realized that here was one of America's great poets. The Pulitzer Prize was awarded him last year for his volume, "New Hampshire". His dramatic lyrics of farm life, his poems of country places

and thoughts, are becoming well known all over this country and Europe. Not so well known, I suppose, as those of Eddie Guest — but then, you know! Frost goes now to Michigan as a permanent resident member of the faculty of that university, an arrangement made by the late President Burton, a sturdy and brilliant organizer and educator. This will give Mr. Frost the whole country, in a sense, for he was born in San Francisco and has made New England his own. Now he will be taken to the heart of the middle west, a cordial heart, to be sure. I could not but remember, as I read Sir Philip Gibbs's excellent tale, "The Reckless Lady", my experiences in Grand Rapids. Although he may be just as right in his picturing of the middle west as I am, there is room for disagreement. All luck to Mr. Frost, then, and congratulations; also to Mrs. Frost, whose grace and dignity have made a rich family life a constant aid to the progress of a poet.

Two interesting Lincoln items come to my desk, both having to do with speeches. The one is Honoré Willis Morrow's "The Lost Speech", a short story reprinted in a most attractive book format; the other, "Lincoln's Last Speech in Springfield in the Campaign of 1858". The latter is published for the first time by the University of Chicago Press, with introduction and other Lincoln matter. If you like large flat books, it is one which you will find interesting. Speaking of large flat books, the loveliest of their kind lie before me, facsimile reprints by the Oxford University