

## THE FICTION READER IN THE NEW SEASON

MANY people who read fiction cannot really be called fiction lovers. They like this kind of novel or that kind of novel. They are excited with E. Phillips Oppenheim and do not know what Theodore Dreiser is all about. Or they are worshippers of D. H. Lawrence and would consider it beneath them to enjoy an evening with Earl Derr Biggers. The truest lover of fiction is, I should say, the person who can sit down with a story, no matter what kind of story it is, and, if it is good of its kind, spend an enjoyable evening with it.

No one admires beautiful writing more than I do; but I confess that I can enjoy a good yarn, for the yarn's sake, even though the writing is far from beautiful. Is it not the reviewer's first duty to show his readers what type of book he is reviewing? Then the reader may reject the type, even though he respects the reviewer's opinion as to its excellence. Among the books that have passed in fine array before us this season, among those announced for early publication, are many whose authors are artists, and many more, to be sure, whose authors are honest workmen.

From other times there are still books which command the public, like James Boyd's exquisitely written Revolutionary story "Drums", the postwar "Soundings" of A. Hamilton Gibbs, the sparkling and impudent pages of "The Green Hat". Of the autumn novels I have a few confessions to make, and I wonder how far you will agree with me. I often wonder if readers ever agree with a reviewer. They constantly write in disagreement,

but it is indeed the rare person who sits down to tell you, "Yes, you're right!" Louis Bromfield's "Possession", I found just as satisfying as "The Green Bay Tree" and, in detail if not in plotting, a far better book. Bromfield has the quality which most novelists of his age lack, of making a room or a person exist in three, sometimes four, dimensions. If you are fond of Galsworthy, you will find Bromfield equally interesting. Naturally, he is not yet so fine an artist; but he is well on the way. To John Erskine's "The Private Life of Helen of Troy" I came late, prejudiced by the fact that I had heard so much of the lady. It is a companionable, a sparkling, a wise book; one to be laid alongside the bed and read for sheer amusement. Its success is thoroughly deserved, its public a growing one. Hugh Walpole always writes well; but he has seldom constructed a story so completely diverting as "Portrait of a Man with Red Hair". It is adventure plus beauty — one of those novels which, it can truly be said, you do not put down until you have finished. Willa Cather presents difficulties to me; for although I appreciate the fine writing in "The Professor's House" I am always looking for as perfect a piece of work as "A Lost Lady", or as rich a portrait as "My Antonia". "Thunder on the Left" seemed to me a fantasy as satisfying as anything that had happened along in years until Marc Connelly's "The Wisdom Tooth" made its bow on Broadway. As I look back on Morley's wistful and bitter novel, I am forced to say that I don't quite know what it's all about;

but the point there is that I thought I did as I read it, which is perhaps all that is necessary. Sherwood Anderson will never do so great a book as "A Story Teller's Story"; but in "Dark Laughter" he strikes occasionally the same depth of beauty and understanding. Fundamentally, Anderson seems to be the poet, and like many poet's novels "Dark Laughter" is emotionally diffuse. So many people have acclaimed DuBose Heyward's "Porgy" as the classic of the American Negro that further word of it here is unnecessary, yet I shall never forget the thrill of reading it in manuscript. In Heyward we find a poet who understands the principles of dramatic narration. "Wild Geese" is an amazing first novel. It springs from the soil, it is simple, occasionally melodramatic, always interesting. A. S. M. Hutchinson, since his early books, has always been difficult for me to read. I found "One Increasing Purpose" hard going; but this is only one opinion. There are many folk who do not usually enjoy novels, and many who do, who find this a brave, entertaining, and purposeful book. "The Perennial Bachelor" is written with charm and distinction. The first part seems more successful than the last; but Anne Parrish has a most unusual quality and a superb sense of characterization.

The new season has already at this writing brought us many books of worth as well as popularity. In "Jericho Sands", Mary Borden attempted a most interesting technical feat, and was successful. She tells a story of mixed loves and religious prejudice, and tells it from both the prejudiced and the tolerant angle. It proves to be fascinating if not always pleasant. "Unchanging Quest" is without ques-

tion Philip Gibbs's most important novel. He has never so well combined a background of international affairs with a moving story. Fannie Hurst attempted to do a most difficult thing in "Appassionata". Her choice of religious fanaticism as a subject, her method of introspective writing, her spendthrift use of color, were dangerous. She has succeeded; but the book hasn't the largeness of purpose that characterized "LummoX". Dreiser's two volume "An American Tragedy" is difficult reading for those who like their English pure; but its power is unmistakable, and the cumulative effect of small incident and small character in achieving drama and character in the large, is astonishing and memorable. Sarah Gertrude Millin's style is, as good as it always has been, as sparse, as intense. Her new story of Africa may be a trifle melodramatic for some, but it is, nevertheless, constantly interesting. Mary Glenn is herself a vitally proportioned character. "The Vanishing American" is by no means Zane Grey's best novel. He knows and loves the Indian, however, and his descriptions are often telling. I. A. R. Wylie's "Black Harvest" is a striking piece of work. Its huge idea, its grotesque detail, its poetic beauty of phrase, commend it to the discriminating. In "Black Valley", the academic Raymond Weaver proves that he is a novelist. Some of the scenes in this story of missionary life in Japan are as vivid as anything in recent fiction. In "Tinsel", Charles Hanson Towne has dared to make fun of the middle western lady of wealth and position. He dares, also, to satirize the denizens of Newport. It is genial fun, a rather usual novel, but one that should amuse many people before the year has run its course. Castellated grandeur forms

the background for Francis Brett Young's "The Dark Tower". In this fairly well told story sturdy plot vies with much atmosphere for first place.

Many of the books mentioned in the following paragraphs are seen as yet only in publishers' announcements; some of them will have appeared long before these words are printed. Yet we can tell what most of them will be like. Charles G. Norris's "Pig Iron" is far and away his best book. This detailed story of a man who resolutely kills the poet in himself at every turn and is a tremendous success in life is, I think, better than Dreiser, a better book in fact than Frank Norris ever wrote — although I have a feeling that his younger brother will consider this statement as heresy. There are passages of great beauty, of rhythm which has heretofore been lacking in Mr. Norris's style. The narrative is punctuated by scenes of humor and characterized all along by a knowing, balanced view of life and an observation of fine detail. "Spanish Bayonet", Stephen Vincent Benét's romantic tale of Florida in the Revolutionary period, is as swift and colorful a novel as I have read in many years. He has captured his period in a few quick strokes, and spends the rest of his time telling a stirring story, with beautiful phrases and striking scenes. Frank Elser's "The Keen Desire" is a book about a newspaper man, written with intensity and a passion for truth telling which involves realistic detail. Harvey O'Higgins has said fine things of the book. Among other things he maintains, "The book is . . . another shot in that battle for better ideals which is being fought by most of our younger writers." "Fifty Candles" is a small mystery story from the expert hand of Earl Derr Biggers. Its back-

ground shifts from San Francisco to the famous beach at Waikiki.

Books from Yale men ornament the spring lists with persistence. Thornton Wilder, whose undergraduate days were marked with brilliance, has written what promises to be a rather sophisticated literary curiosity in "Cabala", which will be his first published book. John Wiley follows his successful "The Education of Peter" with a social study of young love and marriage in "Triumph". Richmond Brooks Barrett publishes a second novel, and F. W. Bronson reveals himself as a writer of brilliance in "Spring Running". There are some half dozen other titles from graduates of this institution, but it is scarcely fair to mention more of them here.

Heywood Brown has hit on an unusual idea in "Gandle Follows his Nose", and it should be one suited to his philosophy. It is of course a thinly veiled fictionizing of the most modern methods of education. Alice Duer Miller writes with a grace that is possessed of few of our women writers. Those who read her unusual "Instruments of Darkness" when it appeared in "The Saturday Evening Post" will look forward to finding it in a volume along with other absorbing tales. L. Adams Beck, otherwise known as E. Barrington, has written a fictionized life of Buddha, which is to be called "The Splendour of Asia". The novel should prove doubly interesting, since it gives the public at large its first chance knowingly to compare this popular writer with her *nom de plume*.

Another Irish romance is announced for Donn Byrne. I had thought that his next novel was to be a story of St. Paul, but apparently "Hangman's House" continues somewhat in the old vein. Back to sheer romance in "The Black Flemings" goes Kathleen Norris

with a story of a lovely heroine, who works out her destiny in spite of the wicked deeds of those about her. T. S. Stribling, who proved in "Birthright" that he could tell the story of primitive people well, has taken the simple folk of the Tennessee mountains as the characters for "Teefallow". And Emma-Lindsay Squier gives us a collection of Indian folk tales in "Children of the Twilight".

Historical romances of one sort and another abound. John Trotwood Moore, long a student of Andrew Jackson, has written another bold romance of the fiery President and called it "Hearts of Hickory". Naomi Mitchison writes with fire and beauty and a large dash of cleverness. Her "Cloud Cuckoo Land" is a story of Athens and Sparta in the fifth century B.C. Polan Banks, in "Black Ivory", transports us to the New Orleans of romantic Creole days. Victorian Boston and England have been chosen as background by a young lady, Esther Forbes, whose publishers announce confidently that she will take her place along with Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Anne Parrish, and Margaret Kennedy. From a glimpse at advance proofs I am inclined to agree with them. Isabel Paterson essays the Elizabethan period with probable brilliance in "The Fourth Queen". By this time, if talking of things constantly ever makes them true, we could call the work of James Branch Cabell historical. His "The Silver Stallion" is the last romance he will write about his mythical province, Poictesme. It will stand as the third book in the series, between "Figures of Earth" and "Domnei". It is subtitled "A Comedy of Redemption".

Adventuresome in title but modern in setting is "The High Adventure" by Jeffery Farnol, the story of another high born vagabond along the roads of

fortune. "The Golden Beast", by E. Phillips Oppenheim, I have read with rapt interest. It is one of those mystery stories which depend upon marvelous and seemingly impossible inventions for their thrill; but who are we to say that any adventure in science, no matter how improbable it seems, is not likely? This is Mr. Oppenheim's best thriller in some seasons. In "The Land of Mist", Conan Doyle's first novel in many years, he writes as always tightly and fascinatingly. A young reporter, investigating mediums for a great London paper, encounters astonishing and thrilling adventures which are, first to last, spellbinding. "Odtaa, or Change for Threepence" is said to follow the manner and method and somewhat the setting of "Sard Harker". If so, it should be read immediately. Only once in years does such a beautifully written shocker as "Sard" present itself. "Riders of the Wind" is a first novel with a good deal of dash and fire — an emotionally adventurous story set in England and the Orient. Good reading, this, for those who like their stories light and swift. Sir Harry Johnston's "Relations" combines events in Australian gold fields with British life in general. Knut Hamsun's lighter vein is again shown in "Rosa", a continuation of "Benoni". A fascinating book with an unusual background is "The Village in the Jungle" by Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf's husband. If, however, the jungle prove too torrid, Edison Marshall's "Child of the Wild" will transport you to the bleak coast of Alaska.

Modern life interpreted by various modern authors stands in grim array before us. An early novel of Sheila Kaye-Smith, "Starbrace", reprinted for the first time in this country, shows a purposeless young Englishman finding

life difficult. "White Fire" by Louis Joseph Vance ventures into theatrical circles and has a fling at the double standard of morality question. Harvey O'Higgins again attempts psychoanalytical fiction in "Clara Barron". Wallace Irwin studies divorce from the child's angle in "Mated". Arthur Train in "The Blind Goddess" dramatizes in fiction his acute knowledge of society and the law. Geoffrey Moss, in "Whipped Cream", writes a strikingly original study of a group of English aristocrats in the puzzled mazes of neuroticism and shifting normality. Brand Whitlock, out of his experiences as our Ambassador to Belgium, gives us in "Uprooted" a study of Americans abroad showing the contrast between those who would become Europeanized and those who cling to their heritage. Ernest Pascal's "Cynthia Codentry" depicts the struggle for adjustment of a young girl who finds herself drifting aimlessly in New York's social set. "The Hounds of Spring" is a story of afterwar days by a member of the youngest generation, Sylvia Thompson. And "Proud Revelry" by Amber Lee furnishes the portrait of a youth whose life

is one drinking party after another.

All in all, this should prove an interesting season for the voracious reader of the novel. There are many more titles that I should like to mention here. I can think of another dozen or so that cry for notice, and twice as many again that are more than worthy and may prove highly popular. After all, though, no one can adequately choose your reading for you. The best we can do is to point the way. No one knows better than the editor or publisher how tastes vary. You will never always agree with one reviewer. You will not always agree with popular taste. To be an independent reader is one of the greatest joys. To enjoy, without prejudice, and to be sincere in the expression of that enjoyment, is a true gift. It is only the reader who is willing to express an original viewpoint who is truly an interesting conversationalist about books. I have always admired the man who is willing to say at a sophisticated dinner party that he enjoys dime novels. Try it some time, if you do. If nothing else happens, your statement should at least prove a powerful stimulant.

—J. F.

## THE PEDDLER

By Marian Van Rensselaer King

**P**EDDLING needles, cotton, pins,  
Wand'ring gipsy of the street —  
Passing slow from door to door  
With tired feet.

Who gives him a friendly smile?  
Who buys of his homely wares?  
Closed doors await him in all streets  
Through which he fares.