

## A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

### HERE ARE ESSAYS

By Will Cuppy

A BOOK of essays underneath the bough — and you may keep your old luxuries. In such case thou and the jug would be equally superfluous, since one simply cannot read essays when all ginned up or otherwise engaged. That is why right minded castaways on desert islands should always choose ten books of essays for ballast. Even a bough, though charming enough in its way, is not at all essential.

And for that matter — to get down to business — neither is a desert island positively needful for reading the new spring volumes of essays by Joseph Conrad, Rose Macaulay, and Sherwood Anderson. Here, of course, are novelists turned essayists rather than true lineal descendants of Montaigne and Elia and such, a fact that will perhaps only serve to heighten the popular interest. As seems but reasonable, much of the distinctive quality of their novels comes through in their essays, which is as much as to say that these volumes are capable of entertaining a very extensive audience containing within itself seething groups of dissenters and scattering cases of fits. It would probably take a singularly gifted reader or a talented liar to swallow all three with equal relish.

Conrad's "Last Essays" are perhaps the most important, for one reason or another. Barring the likely chance of further discoveries and a more thorough gleaning of small items for future publication, the twenty pieces, mostly written after the appearance of "Notes

on Life and Letters" in 1921, may be regarded as indeed the late master's final sheaf. Here are reminiscent essays in Conrad's best manner, some prefaces and miscellaneous shorts reverently gathered from newspapers and periodicals by Richard Curle. Best of all are half a dozen sea pieces which the editor has grouped together as comprising "the shadowy nucleus of a projected work" which might have formed a pendant volume to "The Mirror of the Sea".

All these are rich in interest for the general reader as well as for Conrad fans. Into one sentence the lover of old ships and long voyages under sail can pack an ancient sorrow, thus: "The world contains, or contained then, some people who could put up with a sense of peace for three months." To him the modern ocean liner is "an unpleasantly unsteady imitation of the Ritz Hotel". But you will find no sentimentalities here. Conrad confesses that "Christmas Days at sea are of varied character, fair to middling and down to plainly atrocious." Well he knew, and said so in the unfinished "Legends" upon which he was at work the day before his death, how frequently "the false which is often fatuous also creeps into a worthy or even noble story".

An unusual item is a book review written in 1904, which some busy editor seems to have discarded. And yet it is as good as most book reviews. Finally there is "The Congo Diary" kept by the author in 1890. At Matadi the diarist saw fit strangely to indite, "Prominent characteristic of the social life here; people speaking ill

of each other." At Luasi his English slipped and he recorded that "there is much more trees". There remains in my mind this humble great man's worried wondering, after the completion of "The Nigger of the Narcissus", "who in the world could be interested in such a thing".

Coming to the controversial section, one may observe Rose Macaulay, in "A Casual Commentary", running amuck through the cosmos with a meat ax which I hope will produce very salutary effects. Starting out with an essay on "New Years" which I myself would not be caught dead trying to sell, she instantly comes to and gives a magnificent performance of purposeful wit at its most murderous. "Some Speculations on Human Creatures" is a much needed lambasting of us worms and our poor fuddled minds, so called. Much of it is cynical, more of it is pessimistic, most of it is the gospel truth, and all of it is superb entertainment.

In all of her 238 pages of furious Hades-raising I discovered but two blunders. She errs in stating that Presbyterians "do not have a very good time". She'd be surprised. And she is wrong about doctors. Who else, Miss Macaulay, would have cured my erysipelas? An essayist? The final section, helpfully entitled "Some Other Problems of Life", is burlesque on high gear. This includes sound and funny advice on the various professions masked with a sunny simplicity that would be imbecile if it were not genius. English editors are counseled never to write: "The people of Britain are wrong, as usual, the damned idiots. They never had any sense and probably never will have." Book reviewers are advised always to "try to sound more intelligent than you are", a hint which some may object to on the ground that

a reviewer who does not know that already is too dumb to get a job in the first place.

"Let us suppose for a moment that your brain is not very highly developed", says Miss Macaulay at one point, and gradually works into her real feelings. It might be better for this author's reputation if she would try to be a little more owlish at times. She is getting herself disliked by prominent dullards. Indeed, rather than have this witty lady after my scalp I should be willing to take a chance with the devil himself. I suggest to all haters of right reason disguised as brilliant fun that they get together immediately and try to have Rose Macaulay hanged. But whatever she says is all right with me.

"Sherwood Anderson's Notebook" is something else again. It is probably not to my credit that I find in this author's works less than unalloyed delight. One must have been unduly prejudiced by his famous "An Apology for Crudity", here reprinted, in which he insists upon the importance of being crude. It is an old and a great divide. I am not so crazy about the slicks, either, but between the two of them, give me the slicks every time. The crudes we have with us always.

It would be easy for a malicious critic to point out in these notes, essays, and whatnots examples of that cleverness which Mr. Anderson seems to despise almost as much as slickness. For instance, "Every writer should say to himself every morning, 'I do not have to write. I can be a tramp.'" Now if one of the smarties had said that, it would be not only clever, but funny. It is, anyway. Again, "Popular fictionists are born, not made. You have to be that way." The context is serious, but the joke springs joyfully and unafraid, as nimble and spry as

when it was first cracked. Most of the twenty nine notes are more solemn. They are fantasies, reflections, confessions (often amorous), and unclassified cerebrations of considerable weight and value, especially for admirers of Mr. Anderson's novels.

"I'll Say We've Done Well", an essay on Ohio, is a masterly piece of sustained, though obvious, irony. "A Meeting South", about a crippled poet, Aunt Sally, and real whisky, is beautiful. As for analyzing the author further, I am dissuaded by the statement, "I have never thought any of the critics who have dissected me have got me right." The difficulties of the profession, moreover, are startlingly proved by several of Mr. Anderson's own adventures in it. For him Gertrude Stein "represents something sweet and healthy in our American life". Sure, she does. Paul Rosenfeld is "actually unashamed of being fine and sensitive in his work". Right again. But Ring Lardner "is afraid of the highbrows. They scare him to death." Now why in the name of all that's crude should Ring Lardner be afraid of the highbrows? Still, you never can tell. They say the owl was a baker's daughter.

Last Essays. By Joseph Conrad. Doubleday, Page and Company.  
A Casual Commentary. By Rose Macaulay. Boni and Liveright.  
Sherwood Anderson's Notebook. By Sherwood Anderson. Boni and Liveright.

## "SUMER IS Y CUMEN IN"

By Fairfax Downey

**A**ND may I have prophesied as correctly as I have quoted. At the rather chilly moment of writing, there seems some doubt, owing to activities by Jupiter, the Sun Spotter, as we modern mortals swear. Nevertheless,

as the Walrus didn't quite say, the time has come to speak of summery things — of golf, canoes and summer camps, of roses and the sport of kings.

Golf first. So many people put it in that place at this season. As it happens, this reviewer, whom the editor of THE BOOKMAN recently pictured as moving about golf courses, ceased with a cry of despair to do so fifteen years ago. He seemed congenitally inept at the game and could not have been born with a silver spoon or mashie, either, in his mouth. But when that inevitable moment arrives at which he must resume his efforts in the sport, he will ask no better preparatory reading than Grantland Rice's "The Duffer's Handbook of Golf", illustrated by Clare Briggs. The book instructs not only in how to play but in how not to play. Although the duffer knows the latter full well, his knowledge is often unconscious, and this handbook should help him to chase it out in the open and club it to death. We have here considerably more than a primer. The text, served with delicious condiments, the Briggs cartoons, is salted throughout with a saving sense of humor without which the very thought of golfing is impossible to this reviewer. May the book ameliorate that dufferdom which Mr. Rice believes warped Nero's disposition and was the true reason for Henry VIII's bad treatment of his wives!

The evolution of the duffer is highly dependent upon his environment. To that end, for the solution of the golf traffic problem, decidedly grave at times, and for the sake of the undeveloped golfing territories of these United States, Robert Hunter wrote "The Links". It is the alpha and omega of the new and flourishing profession of golf architect and should be on the list of collateral reading given out when-