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The New Books Drama

(Continued from preceding page)

and "The Flower in Drama" by another name. Essays from these earlier collections are assembled with a view to covering the arts of the theatre, and the book is fitted out with illustrations and questions to serve as a text book. It must be admitted that this matter of preparing the liquid beauties and rarified distinctions of Stark Young for school room consumption is not unlike trying to make drinking cups from a chalice. The essays, standing complete in themselves, when brought together in such a way, offer repetitions from one to another, but they offer an insight and an inspiration, too, that the classroom approaching the theatre needs. They range from acting and direction to costumes and the voice, but unfortunately, they do not complete the study with a chapter on scenic design. If the illustrations are supposed to do this, they fail sadly, for their relation either to the text or to themselves is not made clear, and they themselves are tortured to fit the page. Quite properly at the end of "Theatre Practice," almost as if summing up the essays that have gone before and serving as a symbol for their points, is Mr. Young's fine chapter on Duse.

Fiction

THE CRATER. By ROBERT GORE-BROWNE.

Doran. 1926. \$2.

Stories told by one to another and so recorded by the author almost invariably lack the subtle something that makes for verisimilitude. Here, however, Mr. Gore-Browne has done the exceptional and his narrative stands on its own two feet despite the constant intervention of the philosophic Ross and the author, deck companions homeward bound from Africa in the sullen nights that forbid sleep.

Ross maintains that in Africa the Lowest Common Failing of a man shows in relief more vivid, more fraught with consequence than elsewhere. To the tropic sun and dazzling heat that stun the inhibitions and the sense of cosmic responsibility he attributes Man's resolution to his lowest natural level, the snapping of the chain at its weakest link. And when fate casts him in the way of persons who have been able to put his theory to the test, he sets himself to the piecing together of their experiences, thereby producing a convincing yarn. A singularly plausible solution his is, and we see three souls laid bare upon the altar of Necessity. Which stand the gaff and which gives way before the blast it is hardly fair here to relate.

Mr. Gore-Browne has the story-teller's instinct and a wealth of natural philosophy about him that makes him entertaining and by no means insignificant.

ON AN ISLAND THAT COST \$24.00.

By IRVIN S. COBB. Doran. 1926. \$2.

The career of Mr. Irvin Cobb is not an encouraging phenomenon. He has written a great many books and a great deal more miscellaneous prose for the newspapers and the popular magazines; he has run daily humorous columns; he has made speeches and published anthologies of after dinner wit; he was prolific in his reactions to the war. He has never lacked, apparently, for something to say and someone to print what he has said. He has been successful and syndicated.

There have been signs, in spite of this, that Mr. Cobb was not quite satisfied with mass-production in literature. Notably in his "Old Judge Priest" he tried to break away from the stereotyped in character and the obvious in humor and satire. His success in that book is a matter of opinion, but it must be said that this new collection of short stories, for all that there are evidences of Mr. Cobb's care and determination to make of it something more than hack-work, is never wholly free from the commonplace clichés and the trite description of the newspaper feature writer. It is to be feared that the quantity of Mr. Cobb's writing has robbed his mind and style of any considerable distinction or value, and no reader looking for more than a casually interesting story will be satisfied by these latest examples of his work. Perhaps it is unfair to have expected Mr. Cobb to undergo an ordeal by syndication which has recently proved fatal to humorists and story tellers more distinguished than he, but the hopeful claim of his publishers that he has here written "the epic of twentieth-century Manhattan" makes him clearly open to the application of a high critical standard. As a matter of fact Mr. Cobb is probably well satisfied with many of the things he has done, and he may justly

claim that a public for whatever he writes is not lacking. It is only in the vast number of similar talents that have been swallowed up and will no doubt continue to be swallowed up by the mechanistic literary trend of the day that his situation and careers like his are significant.

The first story, "Standing Room Only," is a fair example of his quality in this book. A lonely old man who lives in New York in the apartment of his daughter, decidedly upon sufferance, is killed by a street car and his body cremated. The ashes, in a little ornamental urn, are forgotten amongst the bric-a-brac in his former home. Considerable sentiment, a somewhat obvious satire, the O. Henry surprise formula, and a facile style make the story at once effective and not particularly worth-while. Crook stories like "The Black Duck" have been done with a great deal more pace by Mr. Cobb himself; elaborate contraptions like "Nobody Sees The Waiter's Face" and "A Coyote In Central Park" are as improbable and as manufactured as a poster advertisement for same new dentifrice. "A Letter to a Relative" is sincere and very full of feeling but it hardly rings a new change on a more than well-exploited subject. Altogether the ten stories are theatric and unbelievable; cinematic, one might label them. Separately, in magazines, they would make acceptable railway literature, but all together there is a superabundance of "sure stuff," so that in the end nothing counts but the cheapness of the whole. It is all a trifle depressing, because one suspects that Mr. Cobb with the most laudable intentions in the world has written in spite of himself just another syndication-standard book.

CAT'S CRADLE. By MAURICE BARING.

Illustrated by DAPHNE BARING. Doubleday, Page. 1926. \$4.

Mr. Baring's novels are not likely to attract the attention they deserve during the period of our present fashions in fiction. He writes in an essentially sober spirit with a fine feeling for values and in a prose that demands admiration in spite of its rather monotonous level of accuracy and urbanity. This monotony is, perhaps, the chief obstacle between the author and many of those readers who have yet to make the acquaintance of his work. There are nearly 800 pages in "Cat's Cradle." Such generosity tends to give a false emphasis to Mr. Baring's monotony. The word should not be mistaken as a synonym for dullness. Mr. Baring is never dull. It would be better if he were, for then his best chapters (and there are many) would stand out in relief from the bulk of the book.

As it is he moves surely and quietly (rather in the fashion of Trollope) through his story, seldom rises and seldom falls. There is little to titillate a reader schooled in the arenas of the twentieth century realists. Yet, when all is said, how much is left to admire in this sensitively constructed biographical novel. The discerning reader will clutch at the hint of Mr. Baring's quality when he comes upon the preface, a dedication to Mr. Hilaire Belloc. "It is a true story, although I invented it." This preface, by the way, is a piece of literary criticism as acute as anything we have recently read. The tale itself concerns the life of an English girl who marries an Italian nobleman and, as it unfolds, we are offered a panorama of nineteenth century Europe, especially its social aspect, painted in admirable colors. "Cat's Cradle" is exceptional in one thing at least. It is a book to be pondered and digested, something wherein the right kind of reader can fasten his intellectual teeth. Because it makes little or no claim upon superficial attention we cannot prophesy its popularity.

SMARANDA. By LORD THOMSON of Cardington. Doran. 1926.

This volume purports to present the diary and fugitive pieces of Brigadier-General Y, a rambling narrative of secret diplomatic missions in various European capitals during the war. The book gives a vivid account of the continued blundering of the allies in the most stupidly conducted war in history. Attention is focussed on the virtual betrayal of Rumania, called in the narrative "Smarandaland." The thin disguise of fiction and the introduction of a tenuous love story serve no purpose other than possibly to prevent the author's being called to account for indiscreet disclosures.

THE COMEBACK. By JOE MILLS
Sears. 1926. \$1.50.

This tale of a collie that mates with a wolf, deserting her master, a wolf hunter, attempts to kill the latter when she finds him removing her puppies from her den, but later on, in a forest fire, dies for him, is by no means the worst of long dog

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stories—which are often extremely bad. Its simplicity is pleasant and its animals behave within reason; one may wonder how many bright hunters would, as Mr. Joe Mills's Jim does, loose a bitch, however well trained, to decoy a dog wolf. Mr. Mills betrays a legitimate but not unflattering admiration of "Lobo" and other tales by Thompson Seton, and it so far infects a crude illustrator that several of his drawings bear obvious resemblances to particular ones of Seton's.

THE BIG HOUSE AT INVER. By E. SOMERVILLE and MARTIN ROSS. Doubleday, Page. 1926. \$2.

"The Big House at Inver," excellent of its kind, is one of those novels almost sure to attract no popular attention, yet not quite distinctive enough to be marked out by *cognoscenti*. In theme, it belongs with that uncommon yet recurrent group of novels, perhaps the most recent of which is Miss Kaye-Smith's "The End of the House of Alard," which describe the decline of landed-gentry fortunes. The scene

(Continued on page 60)

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BETWEEN WORLDS *James Branch Cabell*
After a long and curious conversation the Bishop dutifully enters the Pearly Gates. Mr. Cabell writes with delicious and precious irony.

DEATH IN THE WOODS *Sherwood Anderson*
With Mid-America as a background, Sherwood Anderson tells a story as moving and as colorful as any in "Winesburg, Ohio."

DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP *Edgar Lee Masters*
Mr. Masters definitely established himself as an authentic American poet with his "SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY." "DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP" is worthy of being classed with the best of Mr. Masters's work.

GUATEMALA *William McFee*
From his wide and varied experiences Mr. McFee draws a vivid picture of that little-known country in Central America.

NATHALIA FROM BROOKLYN *Nunnally Johnson*
Mr. Johnson was in a favorable position to observe all the fuss and furor of the Crane episode, still memorable to the readers of the public prints. Mr. Johnson writes intimately of Nathalia, her parents, and her self-constituted "investigators."

IOWA *By Ruth Suckow*
Literary Ladies—ubiquitous everywhere,—but extremely virulent in *Ioway*. Miss Suckow, author of *THE ODYSSEY OF A NICE GIRL* relates a sad tale of a rift in the ranks of Iowan ladies—some preferring to cultivate their minds, others more fruitfully the soil.

STATISTICS SHOW *By Royce B. Howes*
"Figures Never Lie"—but the ingenuity of our statistic-compilers can put to naught the most firmly established aphorism. Royce B. Howes shows how *Figures Fib* in a clever amusing article.

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The New Books Fiction

(Continued from page 58)

of this particular book is Ireland, which its authors know intimately—or which Mr. Ross knew before his death, since the actual execution of the novel is Mrs. Somerville's—and its chief characters the Prendeville family, owners of the Big House. Once important, they have fallen very much lower in the world through a succession of handsome and profligate scions who squandered money, married far beneath them, sowed a crop of illegitimate offspring, and generally seized the day. It is of Kit, the last of the house, that the story chiefly treats; and after covering a hundred and fifty years in a few chapters, it concentrates the remainder of the narrative on the events of a few months in the year 1912.

Kit at twenty-four, living with a very old father and a sixty-year-old half-sister, is true to his line. He falls in love with the right girl just a little too late, and though his fortunes, and those of the house, bid fair for awhile to go favorably, in the end his courtship fails and the great house is sold. It is a tribute to the quality of the book that one feels a very real and moving pang when Inver is sold away, and the concise, ironic ending of the novel is in keeping with that quality. "The Big House at Inver," has, to a moderate degree, almost everything to recommend it. It is interesting and lifelike, it has a touch of charm and of pathos, it is more than usually well-written, freaked with touches of humor and wit, clearly and sympathetically peopled, and without a shade of over-emphasis quietly Irish in spirit. The story proceeds always along surfaces, never for an instant sounding depths or achieving significance, and is a very quiet story to boot, without moments of excitement or intensity; yet it is precisely as a story that it makes its appeal.

Government

THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY. By LOUISE OVERACKER. Macmillan. 1926.

Following the Roosevelt-Taft and Wilson-Clark Presidential primaries of 1912, it looked as if the new method of selecting delegates to national conventions and controlling their votes might become general. President Wilson in his first message to a regular session of Congress rather rashly stated that the subject, he hoped, could be handled promptly and without serious controversy. But the difficulties in the way of a national law governing primary elections are not easy to overcome. In addition, the States themselves have become critical of the device. Nevertheless, the Presidential primary is an important part of our nominating machinery and a book presenting the phenomena it has shown is to be welcomed.

All the factors entering into the Presidential primary are set forth in this volume, from such fundamental matters as control of the action of the delegates, expense, and the question of the open or the closed primary down to details like the form of the ballot. The author, although apparently favoring the Presidential primary, frankly admits that the difficulty of meeting all the problems it creates is "well-nigh insurmountable." To bind a delegate absolutely or to try to get rid of the convention by having a direct popular vote on candidates might cause no complications if a simple plurality were allowed to determine the choice, but this procedure is recognized as unwise. In some way a majority of the party ought to be brought into agreement upon its candidates. This a convention can do. The problem centers around the degree of control—not too rigid, not too loose—of the convention. The value of this book would be increased by connected accounts of the Presidential primary campaigns from 1912 to 1924, but it is a very useful treatise as it stands.

Poetry

GOING-TO-THE-STARS. By VACHEL LINDSAY. Appleton. 1926. \$2.

This is far less finished and vital work than we had a right to expect from Vachel Lindsay. Again, as in "Going-to-the-Sun," the introduction and rhymes are the result of a tramping trip. There is a careless spontaneity to these and to the drawings and hieroglyphs. This is the notebook of an artist, full of rough sketches for poems, of casual pretty reflections, of clever marginal scrawls inspired by a Short Egyptian Grammar. It is a question whether such a notebook should have been put forth as a volume in itself. The work in verse is considerably below Lindsay's best. The material

gathered together is in *disiecta membra poeta*.

Spontaneity has ever been one of Lindsay's great charms as a poet, and the torrential quality of his poetic expression carried one's attention over bad lines and crabbed metrics as a cataract carries a leaf over the rocks just below the surface. But when the torrent ceases from spate the rough and bald nature of the stream bed is obtrusive. Occasional delicate and elusive beauties in the poems here present cannot reconcile one to awkward repetitions and banalities, to childishness frequently without the old saving grace, to prosy tedium in many verses.

Few poets in America have made such a vital and lasting contribution to native poetry as has Lindsay. Therefore we are but all too human in lamenting any apparent diminution of his powers. But we believe it to be an interim. We believe he is tentatively tuning up between acts, and that a new music will succeed.

Travel

ON THE MANDARIN ROAD. ROLAND DORGELES. Century. 1926. \$3.

When an American man of letters rents a Florentine villa for a season the result is quite apt to be a "travel book." When an English gentlewoman of literary tastes spends her first winter in Morocco the result is apt to be another "travel book." But when a French *littérateur* slowly and deliberately assimilates the memories and impressions of life in Indo-China, the result is certain to be more than a "travel book."

In this respect Roland Dorgelès's "On the Mandarin Road" is in no way a disappointment. Shades of Loti and Renan; delicate pastels of jade rice-fields, of shining white marshes, of red roads underneath the palms; sharply etched pictures of slant-eyed coolies toiling under burning suns, of buffaloes driven by youngsters stretched out on their backs, of bare-breasted women singing as they crush their rice; silhouettes of crowded market-places, of dancing girls and temple bells—Dorgelès gives us the myriad lights and deep shadows of unknown Asia, the pungent atmosphere of the edge of the jungle, the life and color and pageantry bordering "on the Mandarin Road."

Yet this is not the exotic Orient of the "Arabian Nights" or the magic mystery of forgotten fairy tales. Charlie Chaplin has invaded the sacred precincts of Confucius, the Ford car has come like a swarm of gnats in the night, and Civilization stalks abroad in the raiment of New York and Paris. The Mandarin Road is a highway of strange contrasts which assault the senses and baffle the imagination. Progress or decadence? The land of fever and heavy rains is traversed by roads and teelgraph lines, and Angkor is no longer hidden away, inaccessible in the heart of its forests. Fathers and sons are poles apart; the one is afraid of the dragon, the other of the policeman.

"On the Mandarin Road" is a study in contrasts, the old pitted against the new, and fast losing ground. While embracing the old, Dorgelès does not discredit the new. "Our Occidental customs introduced into Indo-China have not destroyed the picturesque. They have merely transformed it." The fact, he maintains, that a Chinaman covers his microscopic head with a derby that is much too big for him does not change his nationality. He remains Chinese just the same, uniquely, superbly Chinese.

The book is evidently not built upon a preconceived plan. It appears to be without form and the chapters do not follow consecutively. The method is casual and the style informal, even in translation, at times languorous, at times moving at an astonishing tempo. Yet it should not be otherwise. Brilliant pictures, dusky vignettes, fleeting impressions, comments, conjectures, hopes, and regrets, are delightfully mingled, just as all things are delightfully mingled—in the East.

ENCHANTED TRAILS OF GLACIER PARK. By AGNES C. LAUT. McBride. 1926. \$3.

The wild life and scenic beauty of "America's Switzerland" are here described with authority and appreciation by one who knows the region intimately. Besides her enlightening comment on the forestry, mountains, lakes, birds, and animals of the Park, the author discusses entertainingly its earlier history and that of its original inhabitants, the meagrely surviving Blackfoot Indians. The book is handsomely illustrated, and contains maps, and a valuably informing essay on "The Old Oregon Trail." It should be heartily commended to prospective tourists of this magnificent playground.