

The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received.

Belles Letters

DID HOMER LIVE? By VICTOR BÉRARD. Dutton. 1931.

A general summary of the author's favorite theory that the source of the Odyssey was a Phœnician sea tale. On the basis of linguistic arguments the Phœnicians are credited with most of the achievements of Homeric and pre-Homeric times. The archaeological evidence is almost entirely ignored, and, in spite of some interesting details, the book cannot be considered as of much importance for Homer or his works.

Fiction

LOVERS MUST LEARN. By IRVING FINEMAN. Longmans, Green. 1932. \$2.

In his second published novel Mr. Fineman has written a pleasantly romantic fable that should please a large audience. The plot is concerned with the relationship of his protagonist, Don Peters, to two young women, Lyda and Susan. These two women represent superficially opposing natures—the first unable, through the trauma of an early and unhappy relationship, to give more than a sympathetic and occasionally exciting companionship; the second driven, when she has become convinced of her love, to give all that any woman can give to a man, to merge her physical, emotional, and intellectual interests with those of the man she loves.

It is always presumptuous on the part of a critic to suggest how an author should have done his work, but it will become increasingly apparent to the ordinarily intelligent reader that, in a larger sense, these two women represent trends that are universally present in all women. Thus the author has been impelled to stylize his characters, who only occasionally achieve life and, in the end, represent little more than familiar symbols. They are presented against a background of Parisian expatriate life, and are almost completely stifled by a welter of commonplace observation and physical detail.

THE SHADOW OF A CLOUD. By GRANVILLE TOOGOOD. Brewer, Warren & Putnam. 1932. \$2.50.

Mr. Toogood's second book is on the whole a disappointment. It will be remembered that his first, "Huntsman in the Sky," was good in the details, especially in the conversations and in the reporting of settings, but wanted cohesion. "The Shadow of a Cloud" has likewise good conversations, though not so many of them, and good backgrounds, though they are not so significant as in the earlier book where the author was describing a life he knew intimately; and it likewise lacks cohesion and unity. The title and opening incident form an instance of this, for the book begins with the suicide of the heroine's sister, an event which has no influence on the subsequent story. It is probable that this was meant to warn us that the heroine's story is ill-omened, but this is by no means made clear, and during the earlier chapters, in which the tone is very frivolous, the initial suicide is simply perplexing.

The entire book shows this indecision. Its plot is highly melodramatic, and yet there is not enough excitement to sustain the interest; indeed, it is not until the middle of the book that one is sure that it is to be a novel of plot. But the first part, which is not yet melodramatic, is not good realistic narrative either. It is marred by the overstrained sort of writing one often finds in romances whose authors suspect that they are not being romantic enough; witness the heroine's reflections about an unpleasant young man, an acquaintance of her escort's, seen in a speakeasy: "It is old as sin, that face, for all it should still be young. If the spirit of evil were to walk the earth, I think it would look like that." And the young man so impressively brought to our attention never appears again! There is still good writing in this book, and a few very effective incidents, but one cannot avoid the conclusion that it has more of the author's faults and fewer of his virtues than his first novel.

THE KINGDOM IN THE SKY. By ALICE BROWN. Macmillan. 1932. \$2.50.

An interest in mysticism and things of the spirit leads often to the imaginative picturing of the after-life, and yet for an author this is a subject so fraught with

pitfalls that few can handle it without disaster. In the first place, no two human beings think of such an after-life from the same angle or in the same terms, so that almost inevitably dissatisfaction will result for one reader or another. A parallel sense of incongruity also is almost certainly produced, though probably from different causes, in the minds of different readers. A second difficulty is the problem of interest, especially where a book is cast, as in this case, in the form of a novel. It is extremely difficult to create and sustain interest and suspense in a purely imaginary field, and the story here unfolded has not sufficient strength to stand either alone or upon a basis of mystic inquiry.

Since also speculation, symbolism, aspiration, and historical elements are all intermingled, it will be seen that the author has set herself an extremely intricate problem, which in its effect on the reader is complicated rather than simplified by the fact that human emotions in familiar form are carried over from an earthly existence to function in superhuman surroundings. "Oh, this strange, strange country! Familiar and yet so different! Our rich, welcoming home—yet not the earth!" . . . Interesting in itself is a study of Julius Cæsar, but this is emphasized to such an extent that one feels a divided interest in the plan of the book and is not certain of the motive which the author herself would hold paramount. In short, one admires a courageous project—but can it be carried out?

LIFE IS SUCH A RUSH. By CHRISTINE JOPE-SLADE. Bobbs-Merrill. 1931. \$2.50.

Christine Jope-Slade has a way with her. She writes with such bright ease and light humor that the reader is taken in to the extent of following a set of too conventional characters through too conventional situations without entirely realizing this until the book is closed. Then the spell breaks, and the wish is that anyone who writes so well would find something a little fresher to write about. In "Life is Such a Rush" the protagonists are an English married couple. The husband is a socially-minded type while the wife, more of an individual, finds that marriage curtails rather than develops her personality. Various evidences and proofs of the incompatibility of the couple make up a story wherein both people and plot are too subservient to the author. In the end the wife finds a sort of magic formula which she feels will make her safe against her troublous world, and the novel closes before this has been put to any very severe test.

AN ANGEL IN THE ROOM. By GERARD HOPKINS. Putnam. 1931. \$2.

One cannot read this very finished English novel without being reminded of Henry James. Mr. Hopkins has written in the manner, though certainly not in direct imitation, of that stylistic onlooker at life. He has cut down the length of the book and diminished that of the sentences, but nevertheless there is a Jamesian flavor that will be equally apparent to admirers of and dissenters from the James technique.

The extent of the narrative is just the duration of a London dinner. There are five characters bound together apparently by the lightest and most casual of social meetings. But under this surface fortuity they are held by stronger, stranger bonds. One, the Jamesian onlooker, is a returned traveler. He is in love with the hostess, who has married during his absence. He sees everything from his own point of view and scarcely senses the crisis through which the woman he loves is passing as the dinner progresses. The only other woman, a not very well known guest, is a threat to the house in her relation to the husband, but this means almost nothing to her, absorbed in her own problem of her connection with the other male guest. Each one of these people is shut up in his own personal compartment and sees the others only in relation to his own hopes and schemes. The strands of the story are tied tightly during the dinner and then gradually they loosen, the guests leave, almost nothing has happened, and yet the currents of all the lives have shifted between the cocktails and the coffee.

Mr. Hopkins is very dexterous in focussing his spotlight. Each person is thrown into bright relief at just the mo-

ment of his deepest significance. Each is moved back into the shadows as his influence upon the others diminishes. The ultimate effect upon the reader is that of knowing this chance group both inside and out, knowing them as they think themselves to be and as their friends imagine them.

CHARLOTTE'S ROW. By H. E. BATES. Cape & Ballou. 1931. \$2.

Mr. Bates has a most unusual flair for sensing and creating personality. We have had enough work from his pen by now to know that it is not merely one particular type that he can do, nor even one particular type of types. As he adds figure after figure to his gallery it becomes increasingly apparent that the man, woman, or child he selects for presentation will be set down complete, from the clear physical outlines to the shadowy peripheral margins of personality. Because Mr. Bates writes such fluent and beautiful English and creates so perfectly the scenes through which his stories slowly move, these attributes have been rather overemphasized by critics at the expense of his characterization. The style and the setting are not to be denied, but they come after and grow out of the people they serve. His men and women, or, one should say, women and men, since that seems their relative importance in Mr. Bates's work, come bringing their dark or glowing backgrounds with them, but they come first.

In "Charlotte's Row" it is a little boy through whom the brutality, occasionally beauty glinted, of an English slum is seen. This is an ugly place where ugly things occur, a frightful place for any child to be, and yet so consistently is the boy's limited, sensitive point of view maintained that it is never the story but only what the story is about that touches sordidness. Circumscribed but perfectly proportioned, the book is like a tiny tragic miniature.

LUCY ANDERSON. By HELEN R. MARTIN. Dodd, Mead. 1932. \$2.

The theme of this book is full of human possibilities and potential developments. We have the egotistic husband who thinks himself the only important member of the family since he is an author and will probably some day be distinguished; and the young wife who is so steadily taught that she is inferior, a housekeeper only, a child in the ways of life, that for some time she comes almost to believe it and entirely to submit to the humiliating treatment of the man she is still in love with. All this would be provocative if done less broadly. But almost at once the reader loses faith from mere excess of characterization, especially as the subsidiary participants in the plot fall into the same over-stressed exaggerations—a patronizing sister-in-law, and a long lost brother-in-law who soon becomes the rescuing hero of the story. It is the latter who opens the eyes of Lucy, the doormat wife, or rather who instills into her the courage to act upon her convictions; for of late she has merely kept herself outwardly controlled and blind to the situation, her intelligence being obviously above the possibility of complete unawareness. When her husband also spoils and alienates her child and finally refuses to acknowledge her saving collaboration in his undependable novel-writing, the dam breaks and Lucy at last asserts herself. She, after all, is discovered to be the successful writer of the family as well as its general backbone. The egotist, at last deflated, is shown up to himself and left to his own resources. But he has,

alas, long since become too utterly a cad for us to have any feeling for what should have been a human tragedy.

A book upon such a theme should be an interesting study, especially as in Lucy's case the author shows herself often well able to handle conversation. Controlled phrases with quiet double meanings and gradual growth in self-knowledge make Lucy the most credible being in the book. But the other characters, and sometimes Lucy herself, step out of reality into an artificial world where effects are obtained with naive haste. What the book lacks, for all its interesting skeleton, can be summed up in one word—subtlety.

Travel

KEEP MOVING. By Alfred C. B. Fletcher. Laidlaw.

IN THE WEST INDIES. By John C. Van Dyke. Scribners. \$2.

WHALING IN THE ANTARCTIC. By A. G. Bennett. Holt. \$3.

TRAVEL LETTERS FROM CEYLON, AUSTRALIA, AND SOUTH INDIA. By W. W. Strickland. Westermann.

Brief Mention

Robert Briffault, an anthropologist who was a practising surgeon in modern New Zealand and in the War, has written a book called *Breakdown: The Collapse of Civilization* which is a rather generalized argument to prove that civilization as we have it is hopelessly doomed and not worth changing but that men and women must be saved and saved for better conditions than exist at present. He favors the Russian experiment but the pessimist will find more in his argument than the skeptic or the agnostic. It is a little too generalized to be satisfactory (Brentano, \$2.50). *Rambling Through Science*, by A. L. Leeuw (Whittlesey House, 1932, \$2.50), is itself a ramble through such topics as spiders and the fourth dimension, how tall are you, a modern widow's cruise, and inside an atom. "This book is a series of . . . informal talks on a number of phenomena which recent scientific discoveries have made more confusing to the uninitiated." It reads like an intelligent and well-informed number of *Popular Mechanics* which after all is a definition and not a criticism. *Search*, by Lincoln Ellsworth (Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1932, \$4), is again a series of casual chapters held together by the life thread of an explorer and adventurer who took part in one of the last buffalo hunts, was on the first Polar flight, and went through the Arctic by submarine and Zeppelin. The observant reader must have noticed the number of circus books published this year. One has brought in the other and the last is *Hold Yer Hosses: The Elephants Are Coming* by "Uncle" Bob Sherwood, the last of Barnum's clowns (Macmillan, 1932, \$2.50). This is a first-hand story of circus life and the book is distinguished by very interesting reproductions of posters and woodcuts advertising Jumbo and many other circus celebrities. Attention should be called to Harold Laski's *Studies in Law and Politics* (Yale Press, \$3.), a collection of miscellaneous essays on the law and the state, on Mr. Justice Holmes, on the Socialist tradition, and equivalent topics, for everything that Mr. Laski writes is worth reading. Humbert Wolfe's little book on *George Moore* (Oxford Press, 1932, \$1.50), is a new volume of the Modern Writer series and summarizes its subject both biographically and critically although the author makes no attempt at a life of Moore.



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THE GREEK COFFIN MYSTERY

has every type of suspect in one story, including the "logical" one—and yet you can't guess the murderer! Will Cuppy, *N. Y. Herald Tribune*, says: "If you liked 'The Dutch Shoe Mystery,' etc., you'd be silly not to buy this one!" \$2.00

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