

Miss Willa Cather, Ernest Boyd, Burton Rascoe, Arthur Machen, Edmund Wilson, Jr., and Dr. Wilbur Cross, editor of the *Yale Review*, are among the critics so far represented. The Broadway Translations are similarly introduced. In format they are not to be compared to the Borzoi Classics—some of the volumes, in truth, seem to be printed from plates that have already seen service—but the series is wide in scope and hence extremely interesting. As further volumes are added I shall notice them from time to time.

### *Anthologies*

THE MODERN STUDENT'S BOOK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, edited by Harry Morgan Ayres, Will David Howe and Frederick Morgan Padelford. New York: *Charles Scribner's Sons*.

SIXTY YEARS OF AMERICAN HUMOR, edited by Joseph Lewis French. Boston: *Little, Brown & Company*.

THE BEST SERMONS OF 1924, edited by Joseph Fort Newton. New York: *Harcourt, Brace & Company*.

It is difficult to discover any utility in such anthologies as these. All they offer, at best, is a hurried glimpse of the fields they cover, and that glimpse must be snatched through the colored glasses of the editors' private tastes and prejudices. "The Modern Student's Book of English Literature," a formidable tome of nearly 900 pages, beautifully printed on Bible paper and weighing two-and-a-half pounds, covers twelve centuries. It begins with Widsmith and Beowulf and ends with Alfred Noyes and J. C. Squire. The editors are honest pedagogues, and show all the orthodox preferences of their depressing caste. They have room for Hilaire Belloc, but none for Joseph Conrad; they give Matthew Arnold space for eight contributions, but Huxley space for only one; they print A. C. Benson and Arthur Quiller-Couch, but omit Arnold Bennett, Bernard Shaw and George Moore. Walter Pater is missing. So is Oscar Wilde. I can find no mention of any of the Restoration dramatists. Marlowe is represented by a single lyric—the threadbare "Passionate Shepherd." Thomas Moore is present, but not

Syngé. Macaulay is there, but not Froude, Buckle or Lecky. In brief, a compendium for literary pastors and country school-teachers, eager to get through the business of acquiring culture quickly and in dread of picking up ideas.

Mr. French's collection of humorous pieces is somewhat better done. It contains some excellent stuff by George Ade, Montague Glass, Ring W. Lardner and Harry Leon Wilson, but also some dreadful things by John Kendrick Bangs, the lady humorists of the last generation, and the popular buffoons of half a century ago. It is hard to believe, reading Mr. French's specimens, that people once laughed at Josh Billings and Max Adeler, or at the "Sparrowgrass Papers" of Frederick Swart-out Cozzens. Nothing so bad is printed today, not even in the comic papers. . . . Dr. Newton's book of sermons is simply a cruel give-away of the rev. clergy. He seems to be a connoisseur of such things, and he writes of his preachers with an air of thorough familiarity, but the examples of homiletic science that he presents are pathetic. I have read them all without encountering a single idea. They are all mere platitudes and mush.

### *Cabell*

STRAWS AND PRAYER-BOOKS: DIZAIN DES DIVERSIONS, by James Branch Cabell. New York: *Robert M. McBride & Company*.

OSTENSIBLY, this extremely lively and amusing book is a sort of epilogue to all of Cabell's other books—a final summing-up by an author who grows weary of the pen, and is about to lay it down. But let the Cabellistas hold their fears and protests! Cabell is not only *not* going to quit the trade he so brilliantly adorns; he here offers overwhelming proof that he'll *never* quit it—that is, so long as there is breath in him and he can stagger to his desk on two sticks. To do so would be as impossible for him as it would be for a movie actor to give up wenching. He is moved toward it by an irresistible impulse and

desire, nearly amounting to a tropism. The true artist, indeed, is almost completely the creature of instinct; the Good Citizen is quite right in viewing him somewhat suspiciously, as a fellow defectively broken to correct living. A young man may choose rationally between entering a bank and embracing the tallow business, or even between entering a bank and studying law or taking holy orders, but when he goes in for any of the fine arts it is a sign that God, in His infinite wisdom, has put a ring into his nose, and that the pull at the other end is far beyond his volition and control. Beethoven did not write his music by a logical process; he wrote it by a process comparable to the fine, free, non-sensical jumping of a grasshopper.

Cabell goes into all this at length in his book, and then enters upon a consideration of the nature of art itself. He balks at calling it a criticism of life, apparently because that definition of it has been worn threadbare by pedants, but he is soon saying much the same thing in different words. Art, he maintains, is, in its essence, "an evasion of the distasteful." The artist is "simply one who does not like the earth he inhabits." For the laws of nature "his admiration has always been remarkably temperate, and with the laws of society he has never had any patience whatever." In other words, art is an escape from life. The artist seeks to create an ideal world that is measurably more beautiful and more comfortable than this dreadful world we live in. His value to society lies in the fact that he cannot monopolize it, once he has created it. Anyone with the yearning is free to enter its pearly gates and graze upon its field of asphodel. Cabell himself has led a happy horde that way. He calls his world Poictesme, and he has not only planted it with asphodel but also peopled it with rare and charming folk. They are more real to thousands than Cabell himself. But the friends they make are, in a way, his friends too. Thus the artist leaves his mark upon his time and attains to happiness. Thus, by making life

more bearable to strangers, he makes it more bearable to himself.

"Straws and Prayer-Books" is a fine piece of work, beautifully designed and delicately wrought. It is the composition of one of the soundest artists this great Christian land has yet produced.

### *Brief Notices*

BEGGARS OF LIFE, by Jim Tully. New York: *Albert and Charles Boni*.

SKETCHES from the life of a tramp. The best book of its kind I have ever encountered. Thirty-one strange chapters, and all of them good.

HOW TO KEEP WELL, by A. F. Currier, M.D. New York: *The Century Company*.

THE old-fashioned Family Doctor Book in a new form. Superficial, and, in the main, quite useless.

DAVID WILMOT, FREE-SOILER, by Charles Buxton Going. New York: *D. Appleton & Company*.

A CAREFUL and valuable but almost incredibly dull biography of the author of the Wilmot Proviso. God help the historians who must read it!

PRIMITIVE RELIGION, by Robert H. Lowie. New York: *Boni & Liveright*.

A COMPETENT and extremely interesting study of the religion of savages, by the author of "Primitive Society." The reader will note innumerable points of resemblance to the faiths of various current American sects, notably the Methodists, Christian Scientists, Swedenborgians, United Brethren and Episcopalians.

THE NATURE OF LOVE, by Emmanuel Berl. New York: *The Macmillan Company*.

AN attempt to interpret a physiological phenomenon in mystical terms. Mainly nonsense.

LIONS 'N TIGERS 'N THINGS, by Courtney Ryley Cooper. Boston: *Little, Brown & Company*.

ANECDOTES of the menagerie, many of them very hard to believe, but all of them amusing.