

breeches hanging up to dry. These breeches were untouched by the fire, and so on the first of every May we may go forth and see them still hanging up. Then we hear of the bargain between the flower and the bee whereby the pollen may be carried about to make other flowers grow, while the bee receives as his stipend the honey.

Perhaps we never thought of Father Time's eldest daughter as "very cold and distant", but surely now in the winter time we will often think of her in this way. In the autumn too we will remember the youngest daughter who was "a little extravagant, for she wore a new robe every day".

Mr. Seton tells many a nature secret, and those who are wise will want to harken.

Woodland Tales. By Ernest Thompson Seton. Doubleday, Page and Co.

WHAT OF OUR ESSAYISTS?

By Burton Rascoe

ROBERT BENCHLEY has had the happy idea to publish the American Declaration of Independence as a preface to his new book. Perhaps the idea only appealed to him as a clever one like his idea of dedicating his sensible nonsense to the inventor of Bessemer steel; but I prefer to assume that he is serious in a way which only humorists can afford to be. "*Ridiculum*", wrote Horace, "*acri fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res.*"*

Mr. Benchley had better suited my purpose, to be sure, had he inscribed his book to William Wrigley, to Henry Ford, or to the Messrs. Hart, Schaffner and Marx rather than to an Eng-

*"You can razz a bird better by kidding him than you can by bawling him out."—*Trans. by Ring W. Lardner.*

lish tinker now some years dead. Still, I take his preface to be a paradigm for a declaration of which we stand very much in need. For I hold these truths to be self-evident: that in the field of essay writing contemporary Americans are incomparably superior to the modern Englishmen; that our essayists hold their own with the essayists of all other countries; and that it is intimidated deference to assume the contrary. Our essays are rich and varied, from the delicious fooling of Robert Benchley to the graceful Tory erudition of Paul Elmer More; from the elfin malice of Clarence Day, Jr., to the inquisitive skepticism of F. M. Colby; from the romantic gusto of James Huneker to the lively satire of Simeon Strunsky; from the hearty lampoons of H. L. Mencken to the trenchant sarcasm of Stuart P. Sherman; from the perky perversities of Agnes Repplier to the incisive analysis of Albert Jay Nock. And this is to name but a few.

As a test of my contention I ask only that you read F. M. Colby's latest book and the latest book by Max Beerbohm. Mr. Beerbohm, I take it, is among the best that England has to offer, even if he has long since exiled himself to Rapallo. He has a delicate wit and a precious manner; he is a man of the world; and he is immensely clever. Of himself he has said accurately and with charming modesty that his endowments were slight and that he has been careful not to squander them. In his latest book there is evidence that his patrimony is running low; one sees him scraping here and scraping there. He is a gentleman, and he would not have you know that he has turned his linen and put cardboard in his shoes. His manner is as cultured as heretofore; he retains his jaunty air and his finesse;

but this only serves to remind us that he was always a little bogus and that his snobbery is rather cheap.

Mr. Colby, on the other hand, is the reverse of a snob, though I should say that he has more reason to be one than Mr. Beerbohm. He is an authentic skeptic; he would put the interrogation point after every definite statement, after every pretense of authority, after every assumption of special revelation. And he does this, not in the will to destroy but in an effort to test, the validity of ideas. Superficial and hasty readers have listed him among the reactionaries and standpatters; but this is a grave mistake. No one is more receptive to new things, no one possesses a more eager and curious mind, no one makes a more courageous fight in behalf of the free play of ideas. I can no more account for the neglect of his two other volumes of wise and beautiful essays than I can account for the current misinterpretative mention of his work by the radicals. One may only assume that either they cannot read or that they are acutely conscious of the fragility of their notions. For he is continually saying, in effect, to the young:

I who have been through the mill and who have got into the minds of these old fellows tell you to kick up your heels. Show us how you would do things; let us hear what you have to say. I reserve the right to question you and to poke a little fun at you if you entertain delusions of grandeur or begin to speak in an infallible tone. But this is no more than I do to the jellied old gentlemen with ready-made notions who are your enemy. An idea that cannot withstand the impact of a question is no good; you deceive yourselves by thinking that it is. . . .

That is the attitude of this fine and temperate man who can speak with

distrust of history with good grace because he is an historian; who can be validly skeptical of collegiate political economy because he has taught such subjects in a university; who can discount the claims of scholarship since he is a scholar; and who can view the sum of knowledge with an ironic smile because he is an encyclopaedist. I regret that I have so little space, for I should like to expatiate upon the merit of this writer, whose style is so brightly polished and individual, whose wit is so nicely barbed and unerring, whose logic is so direct and refreshing, whose sanity, human sympathy, and common sense are so pleasurably revealed in his words.

Upon Clarence Day, Jr., too, I should like to dwell at length. He is an original with a keen sense of values, a satyric mockery, and a suave humor. Benchley is utterly gay and irresponsible, with a fantastic mind. Strunsky, who was poignantly human in "Belshazzar Court", now jests at current absurdities. The posthumous Huneker volume is below par for Huneker, but it contains some entertaining impressions nevertheless. Morley was crippled, I think, by his Oxford scholarship, but he is as good as most of the English light essayists he log-rolls so persistently.

The Margin of Hesitation. By Frank Moore Colby. Dodd, Mead and Co.
 And Even Now. By Max Beerbohm. E. P. Dutton and Co.
 The Crow's Nest. By Clarence Day, Jr. Alfred A. Knopf.
 Of All Things. By Robert Benchley. Henry Holt and Co.
 Sinbad and His Friends. By Simeon Strunsky. Henry Holt and Co.
 Variations. By James Huneker. Charles Scribner's Sons.
 Plum Pudding. By Christopher Morley. Doubleday, Page and Co.

RECENT BOOKS IN BRIEF REVIEW

MARIA CHAPDELAINE", a tale of the Lake St. John country, by Louis Hémon (Macmillan), is the sort of book that restores our faith in modern literature. It is a story of the French Canadian people, the pioneers of the present, who are slowly and painfully making farmland out of forests, a story especially about the Chapdelaine family in their little house in the woods, miles from any neighbor. They are rugged men and patient women, elemental in their emotions and childlike in their faith. The translation from the French preserves a poetic simplicity of style, something in the spirit of a Millet etching. It is one of the fine things of the year.

One need not be a regular subscriber at the Aquarium to enjoy "Tortoises" by D. H. Lawrence (Seltzer). The subject is not treated biologically but humanly, very humanly. In a half-dozen free verse lyrics, Mr. Lawrence philosophizes on the significance of this species, and to the misguided individuals who never before realized their importance, the volume will be a revelation. It is not hard to trace his analogies and the verses are replete with a subtle satire that is thoroughly enjoyable. By all means, consider the tortoise.

Because everything that John Drinkwater does is of interest, "Cotswold Characters" (Yale) cannot be overlooked. It is another of those slender little volumes—one teaspoonful of reading—that seem to be popular with the publishers lately. It contains five short but skilful character sketches,

portraits of English country people of an ancient order quite unknown to us. It is clear and concise, kindly and humorous—an example of Drinkwater's best prose style.

Although A. P. Herbert is an Englishman, the title of his latest book, "Little Rays of Moonshine" (Knopf), will have a singular appeal to his American audience, and it quite fulfils the implied promise. He here presents a series of short humorous sketches, each one of which has enough kick in it to be pleasantly stimulating. It is English humor at its best, most of it from "Punch", and all of it apt to leave one in a thoroughly happy frame of mind.

The idolaters of Dickens have been given another complementary volume in B. W. Matz's "The Inns and Taverns of 'Pickwick'" (Scribner). Here is an illustrated collection of descriptive bits regarding those spots visited by the adventuring Pickwickians, in which Mr. Matz shows the buildings as they were and are and relates such anecdotes as have been connected with them since the days of the man who gave them fame.

Elizabeth Bibesco should regret that she will be known by many as the daughter of Margot Asquith, and by others as Princess Bibesco. She requires no support from her mother's reputation, and she has no need of the spurious fame accruing to a writing princess. "I Have Only Myself to Blame" (Doran) has individuality enough to stand by itself. This col-