

# Some New Books We Have Read

## *Adventures in Criticism and Reporting*

BY THE EDITORS

**THE MATHEMATICIAN'S COMPLAINT**  
*Those Barren Leaves.* By Aldous Huxley. George H. Doran Company.

The self-possession of Aldous Huxley must seem maddening to the ignorant, the sentimental, and the dogmatic. In "Those Barren Leaves" he describes the Italian setting of his story, and the varied creatures who have been assembled there in Mrs. Aldwinkle's villa, with a discouraging knowledge. He analyzes all the affectations and postures and tendernesses of his characters as if he had never himself been susceptible to any such frailty. And as to ideas, reactionary or advanced, he plays among them so lightly and devastatingly that he makes it appear absurd to hold to any solid opinion whatever. What shall the ignorant, the sentimental, or the dogmatic do? Most of them, of course, will never even hear of this book. But any who do may have their revenge if they look behind Mr. Huxley's immense scientific sophistication to see why, if he is so sophisticated, he is so distressed by the meaninglessness of life, and in particular is so touched by the horrid spectacle of death.

The fact of the matter is, he is something of a mathematician at

heart. The logical processes of his own mind have led him to expect in the universe an order, if not a purpose, which he does not find there. In another mind, faith might have supplied the peace which is necessary in such cases. Mr. Huxley is too rigorous a logician to be satisfied with faith. He knows that the stout questioner can muddle every argument regarding the origin or destiny of mankind, providence or immortality, the wisdom of human plans, the testimony of instincts, even the validity of logic. Moreover, biology and chemistry have opened expert eyes to avenues of doubt into which amateur skepticism has hitherto been unable to carry doubters.

The result is a welter which, instead of amusing Mr. Huxley by its comic chaos, sickens him. He demands something better. Lacking it, he mingles the berries of desperation in his brewing. Still, he is a man of this world, so he gathers his characters together and sets them dancing, preposterously, ironically. Though as a disappointed mathematician he complains, as a mathematician, nevertheless, he insists in his book upon preserving a kind of mad order. Bitterness and order make him the amazing novelist that he is. C. V. D.

## A MIDDLE MASTER

*Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness.*

By George Inness, Jr. The Century Co.

The hundred years which have elapsed since the birth of George Inness have seen many changes of fashion in painting, and have seen such changes that some of his earlier work now seems thin and remote, as, indeed, it seemed to the later Inness. But the pictures of his maturity do not age or fade. The substantial and lively volume by his son, George Inness, Jr., an artist of already unquestioned fame, throws a good deal of light upon the difference between the two Inness periods. In the first, the young painter, for all his independence of opinion and method, had not yet freed himself from the smooth generalizations of the Hudson River school; in the second, he had become so thoroughly the master of his own devices that he could reproduce his impression of a landscape without any alien admixture. Though born in a generation which often lost itself in details, Inness demanded more than details. Though permitted to live into a generation which often lost itself in total effects without much reference to reality, Inness demanded that his total effects be grounded in realities. He thus struck a golden mean which somehow lies beyond the shift of fashion. His landscapes are at once solid and alive. Having made his observations for a picture on the spot, he was then accustomed to paint within four walls, reworking his raw materials with the high hand of an artist who was both scientist and mystic. The result was that bold and faithful beauty which remains Inness's

essential note. His life by his son is the record of a temperament distinguished by an immense ardor joined to an immense conscientiousness. Truth was what he sought, but he sought it with such fire that he fused its recalcitrant elements into something which was nature and yet was Inness.

*North America.* By J. Russell Smith. Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Mr. Smith expounds the economic resources of North America as Pausanias expounded the monuments and antiquities of Greece. Years of research have gone into this best of treatises upon the bases for human life on the continent from Canada to Panama. The author is enough of a sociologist to relate geography and food supply to the forms of society and government, but he is for the most part content to tell his story by presenting exhaustive materials objectively.

*Mammonart.* By Upton Sinclair. Published by the Author.

Mr. Sinclair argues as he narrates, with speed and force, and with a single-mindedness which never wavers, no matter how simple or how complicated his theme. In the present instance, he has a complicated theme, which he reduces to a bald simplicity. His thesis is that all art may be ruthlessly divided into that which serves the rich and that which serves the poor. Of course it may. But the distinction is not so important as he claims, because it is artificial. There have been as many kinds of artists, viewed economically, as there have been kinds of ordinary men. They have functioned in