

Belles-Lettres. For the past two decades charters of literary trends have periodically announced the demise of the familiar essay. David McCord makes some cogent comments on this foible of the fraternity in reviewing Irwin Edman's book "Under Whatever Sky" on page 27. Professor Edman is, as Mr. McCord points out, one of the valiant little band that keeps the form alive in America. In England the essay is lustier. One of the reasons for its health there is the devotion of such men as E. M. Forster, whose "Two Cheers for Democracy" is discussed below. . . Three of the finest American literary voices of the nineteenth century are the subject of two other books reviewed this week. SRL's Henry Seidel Canby brings out the resemblances and the disparities of Mark Twain and Henry James in a Plutarch-style double-biography, "Turn West, Turn East." Rebecca Patterson offers a novel, if unconvincing, key to one of our great poets in "The Riddle of Emily Dickinson."



—Howard Coster.

E. M. Forster—"unified personality."

In Defense of Values

TWO CHEERS FOR DEMOCRACY.
By E. M. Forster. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 363 pp. \$4.

By JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

THE PUBLISHERS call this collection of essays Mr. Forster's "first full-length book in fifteen years." Such stretchings of a point are not always justified, but this one is. To be sure, the volume is a collection and a very miscellaneous one at that, for the subjects as well as the forms vary all the way from broadcast talks during the late war through personal essays to pure literary criticism. But it is unified more than such collections usually are by the fact that the author is possessed of a very unified personality and by the fact that this personality is very much present no matter what he happens to be talking about. Both his temperament and his opinions are, as he would be the first to admit, what are commonly called old-fashioned. He is a defender of values often overlooked and sometimes rejected by moderns; and though he by no means either washes his hands or surrenders to despair he certainly looks toward the future with a good deal of misgiving. Obviously he sometimes wonders if he is not what his opponents complacently call a characteristic phenomenon of a dying culture.

The book's title, which may at first sight seem trivial and which Mr. For-

ster says was first suggested as a joke, is actually extremely apt. One's attitude toward democracy is today a touchstone, and two, rather than three, cheers precisely defines what Mr. Forster's is. He is almost as far from Eliot as he is from Hitler or Stalin. Yet at his most unhappy he can say: "Democracy is not a Beloved Republic really, and never will be. But it is less hateful than other contemporary forms of government, and to that extent it deserves support." Or, two hundred pages further on, speaking of the shift from agriculture to industrialism: "It has meant the destruction of feudalism and relationship based on land, it has meant the transference of power from the aristocrat to the bureaucrat and the manager and the technician. Perhaps it will mean democracy but it has not meant it yet and personally I hate it."

The nearest Mr. Forster comes to any summings-up are in two essays, one called "The Last Parade," in which he gives an impressionistic account of the Paris Exposition of 1937, where for the last time the modern world demonstrated playfully the toys with which it was about to destroy itself; the other called more formally "What I Believe," dated two years later. But wherever one turns one finds some facet of the unified attitude, and one realizes that Mr. Forster has no all-sufficient faith in Democracy for the same general reason that he has none in any of the other magic formulae such as Economic Law, Proper Conditioning, Psychological Adjustment, or for that matter Christianity. He is not a Utopian; he does not believe that all our problems will ever be solved; and while he admits that tolerance, good temper, and sympathy—in

which he does believe—probably require faith as a "stiffening" even if "the process coarsens them," nevertheless, "I dislike the stuff."

Inevitably Mr. Forster is concerned with the arts—with literature as a professional, with music and painting as an amateur. There are essays on Tolstoy and Proust, on Virginia Woolf, and, what is surprisingly enough the best of the lot, on John Skelton. But here again there is unity, not merely because he has definable and defensible literary tastes, but also because literature is one of the provinces in that realm of human activity where, far less dubiously than in politics or economics or even physical science, unmistakable and enduring achievements have been celebrated. Yet it is perversely just those achievements which democracy as well as every other form of organized power discounts, discourages, and destroys. Not too much has been gained if we escape from the condescension of the aristocratic patron only to fall into the hands of those who insist that art must be, even if not doctrinally correct and demonstrably useful, then at least "democratic," which is taken to mean "universally accessible." And though here again Mr. Forster's conclusions are scattered through half a dozen different essays—and the better for so being—it would not be too difficult to synthesize a body of doctrine.

In the next to the last paragraph of the very last essay occurs the sentence, "The sense of a world that asked to be noticed rather than explained was again upon me." Perhaps nothing else could sum up better his convictions concerning the point at which

Joseph Wood Krutch, Brander Matthews professor of dramatic literature at Columbia University, has written his share of familiar essays, which have been published in such volumes as "The Twelve Seasons."

art begins, no matter how far on from there it may go and no matter to what extent all sorts of other things may become involved in it. There is nothing wrong, he says elsewhere, with "art for art's sake," though there is a great deal wrong with the assumption that nothing except art is important; and probably that little problem has never been more neatly disposed of. If the artist or even the mere lover of the arts is sometimes inclined to give up the whole matter of artistic education and to conclude that since most people care nothing about it there is no reason why he should attempt to make them, he cannot really follow that inclination because the higher pleasures are a kind of religion and the impulse to pass them on is irresistible. Yet, as Mr. Forster says elsewhere, "a writer's duty often exceeds any duty he owes to society" and if he finds "the ideals of his age" hateful "he often ought to lead a forlorn retreat." Still again: "Our chief duty is to enjoy ourselves and not to lose heart, and to spread culture not because we love our fellow men, but because certain things seem to us unique and priceless, and, as it were, push us out into the world on their service."

Not everyone, certainly not every "liberal," will find such ideas congenial. But at least even such should be willing to admit that Mr. Forster has a rare combination of virtues: detachment enough to see clearly; involvement enough to understand what the issue is. He may be the proprietor of an ivory tower, but he is not shut up in it. Towers can also be used to look out from.

Seeking a Poet's Inspiration

THE RIDDLE OF EMILY DICKINSON. By Rebecca Patterson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 434 pp. \$4.50.

By RICHARD CHASE

THIS is another one of those books about Emily Dickinson which assumes that she could have written her poems only as a response to a frustrated love affair, that most of the poems, even when they seem to be about nature or death, are really love poems, and that the language of the poems is a cryptic shorthand carefully calculated to conceal the identity of the beloved person they refer to. Since there is unfortunately no evidence sufficiently reliable either to prove the existence or establish the identity of the Great Lover, the only alternative, for those who insist on a Great Lover, is to choose one by intuition and then search about for corroboration.

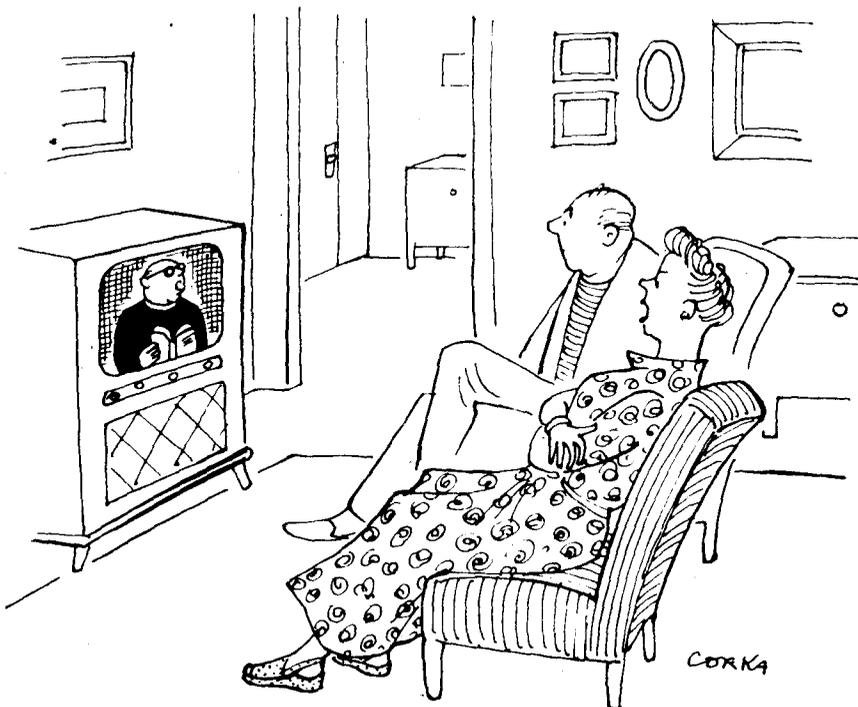
Mrs. Patterson believes that the poet's lover was a woman. And this constitutes her uniqueness among such Dickinson biographers as Josephine Pollitt and Genevieve Taggard, who advanced male candidates. Also unparalleled is the sheer volume of perverse wilfulness with which Mrs. Patterson amasses her loosely circumstantial "evidence." And unlike Miss Taggard at least, she offers the reader very little by way of criticism, scholarship, or commentary which does not stand or fall with her interpretation.

In Mrs. Patterson's opinion the

lover was Kate Scott (later Mrs. Turner and still later Mrs. Anthon), to whom Emily Dickinson wrote several letters which declare an ardent friendship, though hardly more ardent than that declared in other letters to other women. In the period of 1859-1861, the author has convinced herself, the two young women, both feeling "their painful difference from society," fell in love, allowed themselves a trembling encounter upon a "crucial night," and then parted in a manner which left Emily with the conviction that she had been deserted.

Mrs. Patterson accounts for the fact that some of the so-called love poems are addressed to a man by ingeniously supposing that the poet carefully substituted masculine pronouns for feminine. She believes that several poems addressed to women were not published until 1945, in "Bolts of Melody," because they were suppressed by the Dickinson family in order to avoid scandal, although a much more obvious reason is that they are nearly all very inferior poems. Nor does Mrs. Patterson prove that they were all addressed to one woman, nor that any of them was addressed to Kate Scott, nor that they are love poems. Her central piece of evidence is a poem beginning "I shall not murmur if at last," in which a person named Katie is addressed. Yet Mrs. Patterson herself admits that Emily Dickinson knew several Katies. And in any case the biographer has misread the poem, choosing to believe that Emily is accusing Katie of "treason," whereas an objective reading of the poem, taking every fact into consideration, indicates that the poet is speaking metaphorically of her secluded life as having been a kind of "treason" committed against "those I loved below"—that is, against her friends in general. And the book is a tissue of such misreadings, together with an imposing array of unrelatable facts and conjectures.

George F. Whicher's "This Was a Poet" remains the only reliable biography. As for the "lover," in so far as there was one, we shall evidently have to be content with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. The sentiment he shared with Emily Dickinson was of a kind not unknown elsewhere in late nineteenth-century America, a love that gained all its intensity from its own renunciation.



"It's all right, but I miss seeing what people are wearing."

Richard Chase, a member of the English department of Columbia University, is the author of "Herman Melville: A Critical Study."