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Review of "The American Spectator"

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BOOK REVIEWS

valuable glimpse into his intimate life, and may help to humanize the impression which his biographers have tended to create.

K. I. M.


Here is the first number of the eagerly-awaited literary journal concocted by George Jean Nathan and his associates. Sitting with Mr. Nathan in the editorial chairs are Ernest Boyd, Theodore Dreiser, James Branch Cabell (printed that way in the list of editors but signed Branch Cabell in his own article), and Eugene O'Neill—rather a formidable group for this enterprise.

"The American Spectator has no policy in the common sense of the word," the editorial (which sounds like Mr. Nathan) tells us. "It offers an opportunity for the untrammeled expression of individual opinion, ignoring what is accepted and may be taken for granted in favor of the unaccepted and misunderstood." The editors have no illusions about their jobs. If and when they feel that the paper is "becoming a routine job," or is getting dull, "they will call it a day and will retire in a body to their estates."

The Spectator has an impressive list of modern writers as contributors to the first number. Old Doc Havelock Ellis writes the leading article. What do you suppose it is about? Correct. It concerns his favorite subject of sex and is a study of "The Physician and Sex." The sex motif is also represented by a delightful essay-in-minature by Branch Cabell, entitled "The Genteel Tradition in Sex." The task of taking sex sanely "has always baffled Americans as a nation. . . . American literature in especial, has remained singularly unaffected by the persiflage of the drawing-room."

Clarence Darrow, who is always wanting a drink, writes of his favorite subject, prohibition, in "When I Want a Drink." When Mr. Darrow says he wants a drink, he means it. He yearns for the good old days. He regards that early American institution, the saloon, with no phobias. "In the old days I went to the saloon and found little to criticize in the place. To be sure, I picked my saloon, as I do my grocery, and, somehow, I chose different saloons at different times to fit various moods, which is one of the advantages that I miss today."

Frank Swinnerton, who ought to know, has an article on "English and American Publishers." Liam O'Flaherty writes a revealing account of "The Irish Censorship." Other contributions include "Memoranda on Masks" by Eugene O'Neill, "The Theatre" by George Jean Nathan,
"The Diversity of Life" by Calvin B. Bridges, and "The Weakness of American Criticism" by Joseph Wood Krutch. Mr. Krutch's thesis is, in brief: "The real weakness of American criticism lies not in any lack of enthusiasm, suggestiveness, or even brilliance, but in the sporadic, unstable, irresponsible nature of its enthusiasms; in, that is to say, the obviously adolescent character of its repeated conviction that it is mature at last."

It will be seen that The American Spectator ought to prove a journal of literary importance. Even though one may not sympathize with the popular, Menckenized, American Mercury note in it, one must admit that it represents the temper of the times. For that reason it is important and significant. At any rate, one must hope that it will continue to be as interesting and varied in the succeeding issues as it is in the first, and that the editors will not be forced prematurely to "retire to their estates."

C. R. T.


In this very readable book we have the story of one of the world's foremost Christians. It is the story of C. F. Andrews—commonly called "Christ's Faithful Apostle"—who is the only Westerner to become a member of the faculty of the International University of Rabindranath Tagore, world famous Indian Christian poet and philosopher. This bespeaks the broadmindedness of Andrews and his relation to the great leaders of India. In this lies much of the value of the book. Almost every chapter gives a miniature of some eminent personality. The author is possessed with the rather rare ability of a mystic to make intimate contacts and abiding friendships with great men. Through the author we are given portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs. Gandhi (who has suffered in the same cause as her famous husband), Tagore, Albert Schweitzer, Samuel Stokes, Sundar Singh, Mrs. Drew (daughter of W. E. Gladstone and deeply interested in the cause of the oppressed in Africa), and others of this type. Obviously a Christian missionary must be exceedingly broadminded and tolerant as well as amicable to win the friendship of such a diverse group of religionists. As we read the book we discover that his liberality in religion came as the result of a long and intense struggle with the conditioning of a secular, dogmatic, and prejudiced religious background. It is with a great price that he finally wins his emancipation from the shackles of a narrow religious training.

The book in spite of its autobiographical nature is simple, direct,