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SOME RECENT BOOKS

(This paper was compiled for the Wednesday (Feb. 13) by Miss Doris E. Jagel and is published at their request.)

There is, as always, such a multiplicity of new books, appealing to all tastes, that, in order to systematize the matter somewhat, I shall first briefly consider the volumes given by the Bookman as the six "best sellers" for the past year, and then take up some of the more recent books. These best sellers are: Winston Churchill's "The Inside of the Cup," Henry Sidor Harrison's "V. V.'s Eyes," John Fox's "The Heart of the Hills," Jeffery Farnol's "The Amateur Gentleman," Sir Gilbert Parker's "The Judgment House," and Gene Stratton-Porter's "Laddie."

In "The Inside of the Cup," Mr. Churchill has treated very seriously a question that a large number of earnest, thinking people are inclined to treat very seriously. It deals with the intellectual and moral changes through which a man passes from a faith which he has accepted on tradition to a faith which he has achieved; from acceptance of an existing industrial order to one which meets the demands of his creed as a Christian. You are probably all familiar with the story, the young clergyman who comes from a country parish to a city church which numbers among its vestrymen and members some of the wealthiest men in the community. Although earnest and sincere, he finds at the end of two years that he is not obtaining the results he desires, and through a chance happening is led to spend the summer in the city instead of on the yacht of the leading man in his church—from a financial standpoint, at least. At once he comes in contact with a family who have fallen from comfortable circumstances into the direst poverty, but the man refuses the clergyman's proffered help because he is the rector of the church which is controlled by the rich man who is the cause of all his misfortunes, and that very night he throws himself into the river. All summer the minister labors among the poor, investigating their problems and passing through many trying experiences, with the result that his views are greatly changed. His first sermon in the fall, in which he calls upon his parishioners to make clean the inside of the cup, is such that his resignation is asked for, but he decides to remain and the poor flock to the church. The critics say that Mr. Churchill has written much better novels. The popularity of this one, which is still selling, is due to the fact that he takes up certain problems which lie very

close to the consciences of the people. No one, whatever his objections may be to the inferences and conclusions of the novelist, doubts the sincerity or the seriousness of the story.

"V. V.'s Eyes" is a book about which there are conflicting opinions. The Bookman's critic found it "dull, dreadfully dull," while others think it one of the most absorbing stories of the day. "V. V." is a physician, Dr. Vivian, who is devoting his life to the welfare of others, giving his medical services free to the poor and living in their midst. In the course of his sociological work he writes a newspaper article criticizing a certain tobacco factory, saying it is not safe for the operatives, etc., which naturally prejudices against him not only the owner of the factory, but also his family, including the daughter, Carlisle, a beautiful girl, but Carlisle, who appears to be the exact opposite in character of Dr. Vivian. By a singular chain of circumstances her ideas are revolutionized, and she comes not only to admire Dr. Vivian but to love him. The factory finally collapses, and Dr. Vivian loses his life in the attempt to save one of the operatives. Some think that the one or two really worth while personages in the story are squandering their energies upon trying to save a number of other persons, who are not in the least worth while, from the consequences of their own follies; while others are of the opinion that it is a winning story which makes kindness attractive without making it a text.

One is always out of doors and with primitive people in Mr. Fox's stories, and "The Heart of the Hills" takes us far from the madding crowd, from hectic fiction, and from many other disagreeable and unwholesome things; still, in the mountains there are deadly family feuds, in the blue-grass region there is the tobacco trust question with night-riders in its train, at the state capital there are two sets of contending officials, so that tragic moments are not lacking. But even these problems are finally settled, the course of true love at last runs smoothly, and all ends well. The author deserves the credit of being an unusually even writer. If you like one of his books, you are apt to enjoy the others.

The fourth book on the list, Mr. Farnol's "Amateur Gentleman," is a manufactured story, a kind of tour de force, full of "blood and thunder," if one may so express it. The skill with which it is done is undeniable, and its popularity shows that the love of the old-fashioned romance still persists. England in the shadow of the

Boer War is the theme of Sir Gilbert Parker's "The Judgment House." Byng, a big-hearted but coarse-grained capitalist with a fortune at stake in Oom Paul's land, is strongly depicted, and even more so is his half-Boer, half-Hottentot servant Krool, who is at once a Boer spy and the devoted slave of his English master. The later scenes of the book are laid in South Africa, and have fine descriptive quality. The working out of the temperament of Jasmine, Byng's wife, is not as successful as some of the other characters, and the depictions of smart life and London drawing-rooms have been criticised.

"Laddie" is one of those stories that disarm the critic; he is glad to know that people read it. Gene Stratton-Porter is not especially profound or erudite, excepting in regard to the lore of butterflies; but she is blithe, and kindly, and wholesome, and her books all leave you with a sense of having enjoyed a pleasant hour or two of sojourn in the heart of some rolling, balsamic woodland, where the branches overhead are not too dense to keep the glad sunshine from filtering down in fine network of pure gold. There is a tonic value to her books that is often missing from more serious and pretentious writings.

While this list omits some of the ablest books of the year, it shows, at least, that if the fiction which is widely read is not the fiction of genius, it is the fiction of ability, skill, and the whole-some life.

In Mrs. Wharton's "Custom of the Country" one gets away from moral struggle but not from moral conditions. Starting in Apex City and ending in Paris it is a study of the pretty, hard, ambitious American girl who has no morality but a relentless and very practical determination

to "arrive" socially. Mrs. Wharton is entirely at home in suggesting those differences between the social thoroughbred and the imitation which many novelists fail to report through lack of experience.

Less searching, but perhaps more enjoyable, is Mrs. Watts' "Van Cleve." This story appeared serially in the Atlantic Monthly under the title of "Van Cleve and His Friends," which better describes the book, for the reader finds himself led into intimacy with a group of characters, each distinct, each intensely human. Van himself is not heroic or emotional, but steadfast, reticent, with his mind close to business, tolerant of others' faults, ready to bear burdens and make no fuss about it, faithful in love and friendship. This is Mrs. Watts' third novel, and all three are worthy a place of honor in American fiction of this century.

In "The Coryston Family," by Mrs. Ward, one meets the good manners and cultured diction of the English men and women who move leisurely through her stories. Lady Coryston does not succeed in making her sons follow her despotic political leadership despite love or conviction. The lesson of her failure is that individual responsibility must prevail, and that where one cannot lead one must tolerate.

Mrs. Burnett's "T. Tembaron" in its general outline has much to suggest "Little Lord Fauntleroy." The hero begins life in New York as a newsboy, and shortly falls heir to the great estates of Temple Barholm and £70,000 a year. His entanglement with Lady Joan, his friendship for elderly Lady Alicia, his management of his astonishing estates, are all marvelous bits of grown-up fairy tale. In the end

(Continued on page 6)

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