

minimum of scholarly comment is more than worth while. But if the value of the letters lies in the information they contain their appeal is limited to the researcher in literary or social history.

This present edition falls between two stools. The solid, fully documented and fully annotated edition of Mary Shelley's letters appeared in 1944. If we want to get from her letters the great deal of valuable information that Mary Shelley has to offer on her husband, and on Byron and Leigh Hunt and the rest of the Italian-English circle in which the Romantic poets moved, we go to Professor Jones's excellent scholarly edition, with its index and other aids. If we want to read a set of letters just for plain enjoyment, then we do not go to Mary Shelley. She is a solemn self-righteous female "swot" (a daughter of William Godwin could hardly be other), who writes her letters with a wooden spoon. Her early letters to Shelley—get me eight yards of flannel, I need another bottle of laxative. Clara does not thrive on cow's milk—(while no doubt what most wives write to most husbands) make deadly dull reading. Mary Shelley was a worthy woman, and all in all she had not much of a life. She stuck by Shelley while he was alive and stuck by his memory when he died. She produced what is still the best edition of his poems. But, dear, oh dear! she was no letter writer.

—I.A.G.

COMPTON-BURNETT & OTHERS

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT, by Ivy Compton-Burnett; Victor Gollancz. English price, 12 6. *IN THE WET*, by Nevil Shute; Heinemann. Australian price 13 6. *THE HUMAN KIND*, by Alexander Baron; Jonathan Cape. English price, 10 6. *A HUNGRY MAN DREAMS*, by Margaret Lee Runbeck; Peter Davies. English price, 12 6.

IVY COMPTON-BURNETT requires us to read every line and to go at least half-way to meet her if we wish to comprehend. Her books need tranquillity because they make no clamour for our attention. Admittedly a hen is being pecked to death on the first page of *The Present and the Past*. But the passions and sinister events of her stories do not disturb the polite and very mannered style that conveys them. The highly individual form, and the human ingredients—masters, servants and children—scarcely vary from book to book. Only the intangible content, the breath of life, varies. *The Present and the Past* has much less of this than *Two Worlds and Their Ways*. Like many good professionals who deliver regularly, Miss Compton-Burnett has barren patches where she falls back on routine. This book seems to me a barren patch, but the routine itself is a delight.

After the first shock of finding the present Queen of England and her

"BEYOND THE HIGH HIMALAYAS," by Justice William O. Douglas, is to be reviewed by J. J. Saunders (below) in the ZB Book Review session on Sunday evening, August 16. The other books for discussion in the same session are: "Mai-rai-ee," by Chin Kee Onn (reviewer, O. N. Gillespie); "The Sudden View," by Sybille Bedford (A. S. Helm); and "Normandy and Brittany," by Ralph Dutton (Rev. D. Jackson Inglis).



family used as characters in a novel, one is haunted by Nevil Shute's proposition. He pictures a time, 30 years from now, when the Monarchy is the only force binding the Commonwealth. By then, overwork and restrictions have made the Monarch's post so unattractive that the heirs are likely to refuse the succession. In these matters a novelist has more freedom than a journalist and may be bold in his fancies because it is "only a novel." Mr. Shute hits straight at his readers' feelings and imagination, as he knows well how to do. The plot goes through contortions in coming to grips with prickly political ideas, and it is not Mr. Shute's best novel, though it may be the most talked of. There are things in it that needed urgently to be said.

Alexander Baron's short stories or sketches, placed consecutively in autobiographical form, are sample experiences of a young Englishman over the last 20 years. Some of the early ones are irritating in their egotism and self-dramatisation; and it is a pity that, for the sake of filling out the picture, Mr. Baron has included writing so far below his best. In later sketches, particularly the ones of overseas battlefields, he is lifted out of himself into brilliant reporting.

Miss Runbeck writes of a German immigrant who makes good in America, and of his son who makes good in our own times, but in another way and with less self-confidence. The general theme is fairly familiar in modern American fiction. It is a readable book which deals generously with many different kinds of people, and looks sincerely for permanent values. The big class of fiction to which it belongs—the good but less than great—is one of our best guides to the normal life and thought of other countries. It is our only steady contact with everyday America.

—D.F.T.

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

RELIGION IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE, by John R. Everett; Allen and Unwin. English price, 30/-.

A PRODUCT of typical, thorough, American scholarship, this book is yet not too long and detailed to tire the general reader looking for easily assimilated but reliable information. It makes a historical and philosophical study of the place of religion in human life, followed by specific examinations of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity.

The author sees greatly changed attitudes to religion in recent years, mainly in emphasis on efforts to solve political and social problems rather than on conflicts between dogmas and scientific theories. He notes, too, the resemblance of some totalitarian philosophies to religion: "They have their incontrovertible doctrines, they have their public rituals; in the case of communism there is even a succession of prophets—Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin."

Not only Christianity applies its teachings to social problems; Buddhism is doing so as well, and is also engaging in missionary work. The author regards this, though not "a religious age," as an "age of important religious activity."

—Walter Brookes

YOUNG ISHERWOOD

LIONS AND SHADOWS, by Christopher Isherwood; Methuen. English price, 9 6.

YOUNG Isherwood, at boarding school and at Cambridge University, was miserable because he had failed "the test"—he had been born too late

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